

THE LONDON READER

of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

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No. 1560.—VOL. LX.]

FOR THE WEEK ENDING MARCH 25, 1893.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



"YOU DEVIL!" CRIED JANE, CATCHING HOLD OF DEBORAH, WHO WAS ABOUT TO INJURE THE HELPLESS WOMAN ON THE BED.

THE WHITE WITCH.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

It was a dark foggy night in November, when the one fly Rippledale boasted deposited me at Hawthorne Manor, leaving me standing amidst my belongings, feeling forlorn and not a little anxious about my reception. The whole house was wrapped in darkness and silence, and was as different from my father's description, and my dreams of it, as Rome is to London. I was distinctly disappointed, and after I had summoned courage to pull the bell, waited most nervously for some one to appear. I was kept waiting fully three minutes before there came any sound from the interior, and was wondering what on earth I should do if the family had gone away, for I was alone in England, and although I had plenty of money, and could have more for the asking, the prospect was not a pleasant one for a girl of eighteen.

But just as my courage was taking wings to itself, I heard a slow step along the hall, then bolts were withdrawn, and a key turned ponderously in the lock, after which the door was cautiously opened by an old woman. She held a lamp in her hand, which she elevated considerably, the better to see me I suppose; she was little and lean, with a face ruddy as a winter apple, and sharp eyes, which evidently neither knew nor needed the use of spectacles; and she spoke in a thin, high voice, which had a touch of asperity in it.

"What do you want, young woman? and what do you mean by disturbing honest folks at this time of night. If you've got any people its a pity they don't keep you from 'trapesing' about the country at such unchristian hours; mercy on us! (as she caught sight of my numerous trunks) What are you, any way? No, no; we don't want anything; and I daresay you're more thief than hawker!"

I burst out laughing, the whole situation was too funny; I had had some funny experiences in our wanderings from place to place, but none quite so funny as this. That I, Leslie Banks, the great railway contractor's heiress, should be con-

founded with hawker or thief was the height of the ridiculous to me. When I broke into laughter the old woman attempted to shut the door, muttering words uncomplimentary to me; but I prevented her, saying at the same time,—

"Pray listen to me; I have come on a visit to Mr. and Mrs. Hawthorne; I am—"

"You are an impudent impostor," she cried irately. "Master," lifting her voice, "here's an impertinent hussy says she's come to visit you; and she won't go. Just come here yourself, if you please."

I was getting angry now, and when a tall, exceedingly dark man came out into the hall, I spoke sharply,—

"I am Leslie Banks, and, if you are Mr. Hawthorne, my father has sent me to you asking that you will give me shelter until he can return from China. Will you do this? If not, at least let me ask Mrs. Hawthorne to allow me to remain here for to-night."

"There is no Mrs. Hawthorne," answered the man as he advanced, and although he looked worn and troubled, he was the handsomest man I had ever seen; "but I am Jasper Hawthorne, and your father honoured me years ago with his

friendship. You are welcome for his sake. Deborah, bring Miss Banks some refreshments. I am sorry your reception was so ungracious."

"Well, why couldn't she tell me who she was, instead of laughing at me?" said Deborah sourly, although she hastened away to do his bidding. Then Mr. Hawthorne turned to me; he was much younger than I expected to find him, being hardly thirty, and he said,—

"Will you follow me, please, into my own den; there are no fires in any other room but the kitchen. Don't trouble about your luggage, it is perfectly safe, and I will bring it in presently."

So wondering a great deal over this careful housekeeping, I followed him into a room which was half study and half living room. It was smaller than any other apartment in the house, I afterwards discovered, and of course more easily and inexpensively warmed.

"You must be tired," he said courteously, as he wheeled an easy chair towards me; "have you travelled very far to-day?"

"No, only from Calais," I answered lightly, for indeed such a journey was a mere trifle to one who had been a bird of passage for ten out of her eighteen years. "I really have to apologise for dad's very cavalier treatment of you, but he was called quite unexpectedly to China, and I had been ill (for the first time in my life). It was only a temporary indisposition, but dad did not think so long a voyage at this time of the year would be good for me, and so he trespassed on your kindness. He hoped that, although he had not communicated with you for so long, you would not be unwilling to receive me; and that Mrs. Hawthorne—"

"O beg pardon," he broke in quietly, "I informed you there ~~was~~ Mrs. Hawthorne."

I was more matured and less nervous than most girls of my age, owing to the fact (I suppose) that I had travelled much, and been always my father's confidante since my mother died, but I sat there speechless and agitated a little while, because of my stupidity; then I said,—

"I am very sorry; we did not know of your loss. I must have hurt you horribly."

He smiled scornfully I thought.

"Indeed, no, Miss Banks; Mrs. Jasper Hawthorne never existed; I am a bachelor, but when I last saw your father, six years ago, I was on the eve of marriage; only at the eleventh hour the lady, claiming the privilege of her sex, changed her mind."

At this moment Deborah entered with toast, eggs and coffee, and my host gave orders that a fire should be lit in the room appointed for my use. I thought she looked askance at him, and I heard her sigh as she went away, so that I felt very uncomfortable, and begged him not to alter the arrangements of his household for me, saying that there had been times when dad and I had been compelled to "rough it," and been shivering, almost shelterless under many a bitter storm. But he would not hear me; only when I had done justice to the toast and eggs, for I was very hungry, he said, with his slow and apparently rare smile,—

"Now tell me some of your experiences, Miss Banks; we literally stagnate in Rippledale, and I shall be glad to hear of the outside world."

So we sat chatting until Deborah came to say the fire was burning brightly and everything in readiness for me. I was tired, and so wishing my host goodnight, gladly followed her upstairs. There she loitered, doing many little services for me, whilst below I could hear Jasper Hawthorne busy bringing in my trunks. Presently she said, with a very evident effort,—

"Miss Banks, I hope you won't take offence at what I'm going to say, nor think less of the master; but the fact of the matter is, things are not as they used to be at the Manor, and money is very scarce, so that if you don't have all you're used to, you must not consider the master mean. He has had a sight of trouble, and here, where there used to be ten or twelve servants, there's only one—me. I was his father's foster sister, and I love him like a son. I'll do my best for you, so long as you do not add to his troubles."

I went to her then; her devotion, and her but half-repressed grief, touched me keenly.

"Deborah," I said, putting an arm about her,

"I'll not be any trouble, and—and (here I confess I stammered) I am rich; I—I won't be any expense, take this," thrusting my purse into her hand. "You need say nothing to your master, and my father would be angry if he knew I added to Mr. Hawthorne's difficulties."

She hesitated a moment, but I clasped her fingers over the purse with the words "I have plenty more"; and then her keen eyes softened, her lips quivered,—

"Miss," she said, "you're a good girl; and I'll serve you well."

With that she went away, and so weary was I that I slept until nearly noon, when I woke to find Deborah by my bedside with a daintily-arranged tray.

"I came in before," she said, "but you were sleeping so nicely I wouldn't wake you; and the master told me you had had a most fatiguing journey. Well, miss, I'm glad to tell you everything is settled for your comfort; and she's a nice old lady."

I sat up and stared at her in a mystified way.

"I thought you and I were the only women in the house."

"So we were till this morning, miss; but the master is very thoughtful, and he went down quite early to Miss Westall to ask her to stay at the Manor while you're here. You see, he's only a young man without a wife, and Miss Westall's a lady, but mortal poor, and she'll be glad of the change, besides saving expenses."

I should not have thought of the necessity for a chaperone. I was young and had always been accustomed to lead a very Bohemian sort of life; but I was none the less touched by my host's kindly forethought; and, oh, how glad I was that I did not come empty-handed to Rippledale. My gratitude pleased Deborah Trimm, and she said,—

"Miss Leslie, I'm thinking you've come to brighten the place; I've a notion that you'll bring back the lost luck of the Hawthornes. You've got a lucky face."

I, looking into my mirror, laughed; for I suppose no one but Deborah would have found it good to look upon. I am dark, very dark, and I do not boast a single good feature; my mouth is a little too large (but my teeth are undeniably pretty), my nose a little too small, and somewhat tilted. For the rest I have a close crop of curly hair, nearly black, and as unruly as it is possible to be; but, shall I confess it? I am proud of my eyes, they are large, soft and dark as the proverbial Italian, although not a drop of foreign blood is in my veins, and for this I am devoutly thankful—in conclusion I am small and slender.

"Why, Deborah," I said as I turned to her, "I am a queer goddess of luck; I am only an ugly little brown thing."

"Beauty's skin deep," she answered, sententiously, "and the loveliest creature I ever saw was the most wicked, ungrateful, false-hearted girl under the sun. If I live to be as old as Methuselah I'll never forgive her the wrong she did the Hawthornes, and if I ever get a chance to punish her as she deserves, I won't be so slow as to lose it," then she hurried out as though she feared she had said too much. Need I say that she left me devoured with curiosity.

Of Jasper Hawthorne I saw very little; he spent nearly all the day abroad, and the best part of every evening he sat alone in his den. When we met he was courteous and kindly, but he never addressed me save under compulsion. But that Deborah Trimm assured me that I was welcome, and Jasper Hawthorne had even expressed a friendly regard for me, I should have felt myself an intruder.

Miss Westall, my chaperone, was an amiable old maid, with no corners to her character, and really with nothing noteworthy about her. I liked best of all to steal down to the big old-fashioned kitchen and chat with Deborah, who was decidedly worth knowing. One day I said to her,—

"You won't think me impertinent if I ask you how it is you speak so very correctly, Deborah?"

"Not I, missy," laughing, "but if you think that servants in good houses talk as some stupid writers make them do, I can only say you are

making a great mistake. Still, I had greater advantages than most people in my position. I told you I was the old master's foster-sister; well, his mother was very fond of me, and taught me herself all that I know. Then, when he brought home his bride, nothing would content her but having me for her maid. So you see, missy, I had every advantage. But that was in the palmy days of the Hawthornes" (here she sighed), "when carriage after carriage used to roll up the drive every day, and no one was so sought after as Mr. Jasper's beautiful mother."

"But how did all this poverty and misfortune come about. Six years ago Mr. Jasper was a rich man, so my father said."

"He only spoke the truth; but the bank failed in which most of the Hawthornes' fortune lay; then a friend for whom Mr. Jasper had stood bond to the tune of two thousand pounds absconded, and the girl he was to have married ran off with the few remaining jewels. Often and often I've cursed her in my heart, miss, for she spoiled my master's life. I knew her all along as deceitful and ungrateful; but I thought, if only for her own sake, she would have clung to Mr. Jasper. At the first sign of trouble she went and married a dreadful foreigner whom she had known only six weeks."

"I love your stories, Deborah; tell me all about Mr. Jasper's sweetheart."

"Well, if I don't come one else in Rippledale will; though I'm the only one who knows why he did not marry her. My dear, I can't make you understand how beautiful she was; but you must try to fancy to yourself a woman of twenty, tall, with a whole heap of dead gold hair, and a face like a picture with its pink and white and great grey eyes looking out at you from under black lashes. She'd the sweetest mouth, and a voice so soft it was like a bird's song grown low."

"She had been three years with us before Mr. Jasper came home from foreign parts; she was an orphan, and her father had been the old master's friend. When he died he'd nothing to leave her, and she must have starved but for the Hawthornes who took her in and made a daughter of her. Well, Mrs. Hawthorne died and the master did not live long after, then Mr. Jasper came into the property, and being already in love with this wicked woman he proposed to her and was accepted. But she put him off from time to time, thinking her beauty was so great she could win somebody higher than he; and she went for a little while to stay with some relatives of her own, who had never taken any notice of her in her poverty."

"When she came back there was a change in her; I heard afterwards she had learned the master's money was not safe—however, that may be, the crash came in a few days—and she—may Heaven forgive her for I never can, took all that remained of my dear lady's jewels and fled to her lover. Oh, Miss Leslie, it breaks my heart to think of the days that were, and contrast them with those that are."

Silence whilst Deborah kneaded her dough viciously, then I said: "What name did this wicked girl rejoice in?"

"She had a heap of names; the old master called her 'Circe,' because he said she could coax the hardest heart into loving her; I called her the White Witch, but she was christened Ciris Pope. There's a lot in a name miss, and she might have been better if her people hadn't sent her into the world with such a queer one. Why, Mr. Jasper told me it meant 'a sea-bird'—what nonsense, and begging your pardon, miss the only thing I don't like about you is your name."

"What does that mean, Deborah?" I asked, laughingly, "I do not know."

"Nor I, miss," and she turned to some fresh task, whilst I entreated that I might help her. She demurred, but when I saw that she really had more to do than she could well accomplish I insisted, and from that morning I was deputed to keep the rooms well dusted (Deborah was very careful to inspect my work), and occasionally I was allowed to help in the preparation of the five o'clock dinner.

Thus eventless, but pleasantly, a month passed by, and it was fast nearing Christmas.

I had received one letter from dad, containing news of every description, and an order upon his bankers for any sum I might require. And with a sense of importance I ran to ask Deborah how to make the season bright.

CHAPTER II.

It wanted but two days to Christmas; in Mr. Jasper's frequent absence from the house Deborah and I had washed all the washable hangings, and beautified the rooms so far as was possible.

I dared not indulge in new ones, lest my host's pride should be wounded, and more than anything I dreaded to lose his hard-won esteem.

Deborah had paid a high compliment to me when she said: "Missy, I'll leave the den to you entirely; and I think it had best be done to-day, because the master will be high busy after this up to Christmas Eve. His few remaining tenants are bothersome people, and will stop for hours just for the sake of a drop of whisky."

So I ran to the den with my arms laden with evergreens, and after spending a busy and happy morning, turned to survey my work.

"It is really creditable to you, Leslie," I said aloud, "and the master of Hawthorne Manor should certainly be gratified by the taste you have displayed in adorning his very solemn portrait. You require recreation, my dear—" and lifting my skirts a little, I began slowly and gravely to waltz round the room.

But opposite a long mirror I stood transfixed with shame and confusion, for there was Mr. Jasper, regarding me with a quiet little smile, and his eyes were brighter than I had ever known them.

"The master of Hawthorne Manor is gratified," he said, with a ripple of suppressed laughter in his voice; "he never had so great an honour paid him before—under the compliment his solemnity relaxes, Miss Leslie."

I was not only ashamed but angry, and I flashed on him with the words "You are a sneak to steal upon one in such a way."

He, quietly dropping into the nearest chair, laughed softly. "When young ladies are addicted to talking aloud, and waiting alone, don't you think their conduct may give rise to queerest thoughts? And, really, Miss Leslie, I don't believe you are honestly angry with me—"

"Indeed I am," I answered, forgetful of all I should have remembered, "I wish I had never come here to be ridiculed. I wish I had never entered your room—or your house—"

"It is a dull one," he answered, coldly, "I scarcely wonder that you wish yourself away."

"I—I did not mean that," I said, miserably, "but—but—"

"You are honest now; for God's sake keep your honesty. I would far rather you did not apologise."

And I sneaked out of the room like a thief.

I cried like a baby when I reached my chamber, although why I should care for Jasper Hawthorne's displeasure I did not then know; like a baby I refused to go down to dinner, and had serious thoughts of running away to my father, only Deborah scolded me roundly for my folly, threatening all sorts of punishments if I behaved madly, and the following morning fairly compelled me to go down to breakfast.

Mr. Jasper met me formally, and I sank into my chair with an uncomfortable sense of having done wrong.

The meal was a very quiet one, and when Miss Westall rose, I followed her hastily to the door, there I took heart of grace and paused; "You will forgive my very childish exhibition of temper," I said, my cheeks all aflame and my eyes downcast, "I am very angry with myself when I remember it."

I dared not look up, but I knew very well just the expression the word when he said coldly, "You have no reason to be so; the matter is too trivial for regret—pray forget it."

Thus was my apology met, and I had to cry

a little to myself before I could recover the treatment I had received, because you see, all my life I had been indulged to the top of my bent.

In the afternoon Mr. Jasper went out alone, according to habit, and it was growing dusk when he returned. I heard Deborah Triumphant cry out, and wondered what had happened; then Miss Westall's shrill little scream warned me something was very wrong. I sat up in my chair to listen.

A minute later Miss Westall, bursting into my room, cried hysterically "Oh Leslie, come down at once; Mr. Hawthorne has hurt himself dreadfully, and Deborah wants help. We are afraid he will bleed to death."

I waited to hear no more, but running with all speed downstairs, entered the den, where Jasper lay upon the couch as white as death, hardly conscious, and with blood pouring from his right wrist.

"I want your help," Deborah said, with a savage glance at Miss Westall, who stood weeping; "don't be a fool, Miss Leslie, and start crying or fainting. If you do the last of the Hawthornes will leave us. Here, get me these bandages ready—so!—now hold his wrist as hard as you can. Never mind the blood on your hands, so long as we save his life;" and she began rapidly to bind up the wound. Then she moistened his lips with brandy, and turning to us, said, "which of you will go for Doctor Pearson—Miss Westall, it isn't fit for a young girl to go so far alone, and I may want help, will you go?"

"Oh, I dare not! I dare not! Really, Deborah, you ought not to ask it."

"I will go," I cried, although my heart sank at the prospect of so dark a journey. It was a mile to Doctor Pearson's, and the road was lonely; but I would have done far more than that for Jasper Hawthorne.

Miss Westall brought me a hat and shawl, and as I rapidly dressed, the dark eyes of my host opened fully and gratefully upon me, although he tried to forbid my going.

Warned by that glance I went out into the gathering evening, and ran like a mad thing to Doctor Pearson's. Fortunately, he drove up to his door just as I reached it, and, giving poor fat old Tony no rest, returned with me to Rippledale Manor.

Well, the wound was dangerous. Deborah prepared fresh bandages, whilst I held the poor unaimed wrist as firmly as my trembling fingers would allow; and, slowly, a little colour stole back into Jasper's face; his eyes opened, and he murmured an apology for the trouble he was giving.

"Nonsense," said the doctor, "we are all willing nurses here; but let me tell you, Hawthorne, that you must be careful with yourself, and above all keep quiet. There is a deal of fever about you, and, by the way, how did you happen to hurt yourself so badly?"

"I had my clasp-knife out (I had been slashing away at some brambles to make my way clear into Deadman's dyke), and just as I thought I had accomplished my object I stumbled, dropped my knife, and fell with my right wrist, so—upon it—that is all. Miss Banks, I am most truly sorry to have given you so much trouble;" but not a word did I answer, it hurt me so cruelly to see him lying there so white and helpless; but I think he understood what kept me silent, for he smiled as he said, "Deborah, you will see this child goes early to rest, and scold her if she shows any disinclination for sleep."

Considering myself dismissed I went up to my room, but not to sleep.

Christmas morning dawned foggy and cold.

"I am not going to church," I said to Deborah, "Miss Westall will do duty for both," for I verily believe she would not have missed one single service even had an earthquake shaken Rippledale to its very foundations.

About twelve Jasper came down, looking terribly weak and ill; but his face brightened a little when he saw me, and as I jumped up to assist him to the couch, he said,—

"Why are you staying at home? It is dull enough in all conscience."

"I hoped I could amuse you," I answered, demurely. "I have brought down some good

books—not good ones—would you like me to read to you?"

"If you will be so kind;" but his face did not express much pleasure, and, to use a homely phrase, my heart was in my boots as I asked,—

"Which shall I read? *Rasselas*, *Sartor Resartus*, or shall I choose something from Shakespeare, or Morris's *Earthly Paradise*?"

"Let it be Morris," he said; and I began "The death of Paris," in a voice which would tremble despite myself. But as I went on the beauty and pathos of the poem carried me out of myself, and though the salt tears stung my lids, I forgot to be ashamed of them, forgot even my listener's presence, until I came to the closing words:

"The sun shone on his east-back golden head,
And merry was the world, though he was dead."

He gave a little sound of pleasure, then he said,—

"Miss Leslie, you have the true artistic temperament, and you have given me greater enjoyment than you guess. Why, you foolish child, I declare there are tears on your cheeks—"

"Oh, don't notice me," I cried, burning with shame, "I am always more or less stupid—generally more, I think."

He smiled indulgently at me, then bade me take my books to him that he might look at them. And our happy hours dated from that Christmas morning!

There was no one in the world to me like Jasper; and it sometimes his transient coldness pained, and the thought of Ciris Pope troubled me, his first genial look or gentle word made me forget all save the facts that I loved him and was not worthy of him; but I prayed very humbly that I might be made so, and I hoped for a happy ending to my dream.

Jasper's wound healed quickly, though he still wore his arm in a sling by Dr. Pearson's advice; but he went about as usual, surprising me one day early in January by asking me to share his morning walk.

"You look paler than you should," he said. "You stay too much indoors, and I suppose it is lonely for you walking about Rippledale. Miss Westall is a wretched pedestrian, which probably accounts for the fact that you generally dispense with her society. Get your hat and wraps; I am going to give you a good spin."

I needed no second bidding, and very soon we were out in the open, and walking at a brisk pace.

It was a clear and frosty morning; the roads were in excellent condition, and I was in the best of spirits.

I quite forgot to be afraid of Jasper, and he looked down at me with such kind eyes, smiling over any whimsical speech of mine, that I seemed to be in Paradise, and forgot all about Ciris Pope.

On an eminence we paused, and looking down I saw a pretty Swiss cottage standing in a big garden. It was evidently empty, and I said,—

"Oh, what a shame such an ideal residence should be tenantless. Who is the fortunate owner?"

There was a cloud on Jasper's brow as he answered,—

"A London publican now; once it formed part of the Hawthorne estate; but it went in the grand crash."

"I am so sorry," I said, "that I have recalled painful memories."

"You did not recall them," he answered; "they are never absent from my mind. I would give twenty years out of my life if, at the end of them, I might again come into my own; sometimes I am afraid that will never be."

We were silent a moment, then he went on,—

"Perhaps you think it strange that, having neither wife nor child, I should set such store upon the old places, because even if I won them back they must pass after my death to a very distant relative. But when I lost my wealth I lost all, and I vowed then I would never rest until I had restored my fallen fortunes."

I knew he was thinking of Ciris Pope, and my heart sank, but I said, with all the cheerfulness I could assume,—

"Deborah has told me something of your am-

bition and the invention which keeps you nightly in your den—"

"If I had only the money to prosecute it further—"

"Let dad help you," I interrupted, eagerly; "he would be proud and glad to do so, and he is so much, so very much your debtor."

"You are good to suggest such a thing, Miss Leslie; but I will have no man's help; by my own efforts I sink or swim."

"Ah!" I said; "you have lost all faith in humanity—"

"I fought hard to keep it; but of all my friends there is not one left, save Deborah. When poverty came they forsook me and fled. Does ever a visitor cross my threshold? Do not even the villagers treat me with scant respect because they have nothing to gain by civility? You say rightly, I have lost faith in my fellow-creatures. With the loss of my fortune, the woman I loved more than life itself failed me. My dearest friend absconded, leaving me, crippled as I was, to pay his debts. The times are out of joint."

"Just because a few have been treacherous you condemn all," I cried, indignantly; "it is neither just nor right."

"Miss Leslie, I have had bitter experience. Now you, child—you look true, but are you, are you?"

I broke into a miserable laugh.

"I dare not praise myself," I said, as I hurried down the hill-side. I was shivering, but not with cold, and when I reached level ground I was compelled to halt.

In a leisurely fashion Jasper Hawthorne joined me.

"You are too impetuous," he said; "you have deprived yourself of breath by the mad haste you made. Child, are you ill? You look so white."

"Then a miracle has been performed. I never knew until now that an Ethiopian could change her skin."

Something in my tone seemed to strike him, for, catching my hands in his, he said,—

"Poor little girl! Did I hurt you? Are you angry with me? Let me look at you and judge for myself."

But I wrenched myself away, saying,—

"I am neither angry nor hurt. You should not allow your imagination to run riot," and began to walk quickly away, when his voice, low and firm, almost stern, said,—

"Come back, Leslie; this is foolish," and so much was I under his sway that I obeyed, standing before him with downcast eyes and flushed face.

"If you are as true as you seem you will answer me honestly. Have I made you angry by my sweeping judgment on friends at large? Or are you simply vexed because I seemed to doubt you?"

"It was all so horrid," I said, uncertainly; "but, believe it or not, I am your loyal friend, and—and I was hurt."

"Poor little girl!" and a kind hand was laid upon my shoulder. "Poor little girl! I verily believe you mean every word you say now, but you are so young, and women are weak. When you leave Rippledale you will naturally forget all about the master of Hawthorne Manor, or think only of him with a thrill of repugnance."

"If you really believe that, I have no more to say," I answered, with as much dignity as I could assume; "but I do not envy your state of mind. You are like Diogenes looking for an honest man. He could not find one. Most likely the fault was in himself. If you were all true you would be less prone to think others false," with which insolent remark I set my face towards home, Mr. Hawthorne walking solemnly beside me, and not another word did we speak.

For three days we preserved a coldly courteous attitude towards each other; but on the fourth, as I was passing the den, he came out, and with the words,—

"Miss Leslie, I want you," put out his hand and drew me in with gentle force.

"How long are we to remain enemies?" he asked, as he closed the door and barred my escape effectually. "Won't you forgive me my offence

when I tell you I have misused your visits and your readings sorely?"

I flashed a glance at him. His face was kind, but troubled.

"Will you promise never again to insult me by doubting me?"

"Child, I have never had a real friend! Are you to teach me faith?"

"Oh, I hope so; because, whatever comes, I am your friend, Mr. Jasper."

He stooped and lightly touched my hair with his lips.

CHAPTER III.

THERE it lay before me—that hateful letter which told me I was no longer necessary to my father; that he had taken to himself a new wife whose praises he sung with all the ardour of a youthful lover. Let him speak for himself in this one passage which I call from his letter.

"It seems absurd to call so young and lovely a woman your mother, neither does my darling desire it. She would prefer to be as an elder sister to you, and I am quite assured you cannot fail to be the best and dearest of friends. It is a marvel to me that she should care for me at all, she being so youthful, beautiful, and bewitching; but the fact remains the same, and I am a happy man because of it. Of course you will wish to know all about her. Well, I like to pique your curiosity, my dear, and so I shall simply tell you that she is a lady, the widow of a distinguished officer, and the loveliest woman under the sun. She begs me to convey her kindest wishes and assurances of affection to you; you may expect us home on or about the fourteenth of July—if Hawthorne will keep you until the eighteenth I shall be glad, as I have re-engaged the old house at Brighton, and your mother and I wish to superintend the rearrangement of rooms and furniture. Best wishes to Hawthorne and your dear little self. You must love my wife for my sake."

Patches of June sunlight lay all about the floor, danced upon the walls, and mockingly hovered above that wretched letter as I sat blindly staring at it. So he was married—my dear dad! He had forgotten my own sweet mother, and put another woman in her stead—she was sure to be horrid. If only he had been less slow in choosing another wife, I should not have cared so much; but to bring some strange woman home, just when I hoped I might in some way fill my dead mother's place was hard to bear.

Then I thought of dad as a lover, and remembering his rotundity, and the little bald patch upon his head "just where the wool ought to grow," I leaned my face upon my arms and laughed hysterically.

Presently a hand, so gentle yet so firm that I never could mistake it for any other, pressed my shoulder.

"What is the matter, Leslie?" asked that dearest voice in all the world, and without replying or looking up, I thrust the letter towards him. As he read the canary in the window chirped blithely, and the scent of the June roses stole in through the open window.

"Well?" he said, tentatively, "well, Leslie, what now?"

"It is not well," I cried passionately, lifting my woe-begone face to his. "She is sure to be horrid, and she is already mysterious. She has come between us—dad and I—and you never can guess how dearly I loved him."

"And love him still, Leslie," gravely, "you boast of your loyalty."

"Yes," I answered, meekly, feeling very much "sat upon;" "but don't you see we can never be the same to each other; that dreadful woman will take him completely from me. I know I shall hate her—I am jealous of her already—and—and—I feel I never can go home any more."

He seemed about to speak, and that eagerly, but checked himself, and with a sob I said,—

"I don't much care what comes to me now; I am practically alone in the world. Are not you rejoicing that you are relieved from your responsibilities on the eighteenth of next month? Pray don't scruple to tell the truth" (bitterly, as he

remained silent); "I have been very troublesome. You will be well rid of me."

He strode backwards and forwards with knitted brows, then quite suddenly pausing before me he said, tersely,—

"It will be a black day when you leave us," and my heart leapt up in my breast. Did he care for me a little? Was it possible such joy was for me? I could not speak, but my eyes must have done duty for my tongue; for he went on quickly,—

"You will leave heavy hearts behind you—but that poverty and honour alike forbid it, there is something I would tell you" (how fast his breath came) "but it is a bitter case, and—and—*Leslie you must go!*"

Could I let him spoil his life and mine when I read in his dear face all my heart had desired to know; a thousand times no. I stretched out my hands to him as I said,—

"Forget your poverty. I can trust to your honour, and speak."

He held my fingers close, and looked into my eyes until they drooped, and then he said,—

"I am a presumptuous fool, and expect nothing but misery for my presumption; but, Leslie, I who swore never again to trust a woman, trust you, love you with all my soul—and I must lose you."

"No," I said between laughing and crying, and so shaken by happiness I hardly knew what words I spoke, "you need not lose me; I—I would like to stay for ever here."

"But, Leslie! Oh, my little darling—it cannot be—I am all but a pauper, and your father would never consent."

"Then let me share your poverty. Dad does not want me now."

He lifted my face between his hands.

"Is this love or pity, Leslie?"

"It is love; you are too great for pity," and then I was in his arms, kissed and held fast, whilst he whispered such words as I had never in my wildest dreams believed that I should hear fall from his lips. Ah! what a triumph for me—the little, plain brown girl to win his great heart from the beautiful woman he had once loved—it was so great that I grew humble, and with hidden face asked,—

"Are you quite, quite sure that you really care for me, Jasper? That I am almost as dear to you as she was?"

"That was passion, sweetheart; to you I give love—there is a distinction with a tremendous difference. I know that should fate step between us, no other girl will ever wear my name. She could not move me now even though she brought all the battery of her charms to bear upon me," and I knew he spoke the truth, and felt no longer any fear for my future.

My father's second marriage, although still a painful subject to me, ceased to cause me poignant anguish, and remembering his generous nature I was convinced he would not let me go empty-handed to Jasper; with my money he should finish and patent his great invention, and with happiness, prosperity should return to Hawthorne Manor. I was very, very happy in these days. Deborah Trimm could never do enough to prove her affection for me, and I had the joy of seeing my lover's grave face brighten, and his dark eyes lose their shadows whenever I came into his presence.

All too soon the eighteenth day of July came. My father had notified me of his and his bride's safe arrival at Brighton, and expressed the joy he felt at the thought of seeing me once again.

I refused to allow my lover to accompany me, wishing to see first what manner of woman my stepmother was, and if she proved quite impossible I had promised to write him at once that he might not carry out his intention of following me on the succeeding week.

I reached Brighton without adventure and dad met me. He certainly looked younger, and was dressed in a very juvenile fashion, whilst his face positively beamed with joy.

"Welcome home, dear," he said, kissing me, "you are looking bonny. It suits us both, Leslie, to be in love, and I must say that if Jasper Hawthorne has not changed you are a lucky girl. Sorry to hear of his loss, but you won't go empty handed

to him. Your mamma was very pleased with the pretty way you received my news;" and he began to indulge in a perfect psalm in her praise, until I said, brusquely, "Father, who and what was the second Mrs. Banks?"

"Oh, did I not tell you? She was Madame Ferrari, and her husband died when she was only twenty-two. He was a queer sort, and although he had been supposed wealthy he positively left no effects, so that on his decease my poor darling had to earn her own livelihood. She went out to Canton as governess to Colonel Matterson's children.

"Quite a romance," I said; "but *who* was she before her marriage?"

Dad flashed an angry look at me.

"I never dreamed of asking her a single question. It was enough for me that she was a lady and a good woman; that should content you, too, Leslie."

Feeling snubbed I said no more, and was indeed glad when we reached home, because the dreaded ordeal would the sooner be over.

Once in the hall, dad cried out, "Ciria! Ciria! here is Leslie!" and I felt myself grow suddenly cold and pale. It was such an uncommon name, what if my father had married that arch thief and traitress Ciria Pope?

As I stood motionless I heard the *frou-frou* of silken skirts, and lifting my eyes, saw coming towards me the most beautiful woman I had ever looked upon. She was "tall, with a whole heap of dead gold hair, a face like a picture with its pink and white, and great grey eyes looking out from under black lashes, and she had the sweetest mouth."

As I looked my heart died within me, for I knew that so wicked a woman could only bring misery to the man who loved her.

With slow, and sinuous movements she came on, a smile of welcome curving her lips; and when she was quite near, she put out her slender hands which, despite all their slenderness were very strong; and said in the softest of voices as she drew me near to her, "Welcome home, dear Leslie," and holding me by the waist kissed me. Then she put me a little from her, not relaxing her grasp; and as I gazed on the wonderful face with the magnetic eyes, I understood what manner of woman Elizabeth Browning described when she wrote—

"So fair,
She takes the breath of men away
Who gaze upon her unaware."

She saw the influence her beauty had upon me, and smiled; then, in that caressing voice, which made mine sound so harsh in comparison, she said, "Come to my room, and rest dear; no" (to my father with a gay smile), "we will dispense with your society a little while, Leslie and I will be well acquainted before dinner is announced. How tired you look, child," and she motioned me to follow her up the broad staircase. I found my rooms had been set aside for her use, but that I cared very little about. I think the shock of my discovery had numbed sense and feeling alike; and there I stood like an idiot in the dainty pink-and-blue boudoir. My stepmother turning, looked fully at me; then she said in that slow musical voice of hers,—

"I understand from Charles that you are engaged to Mr. Jasper Hawthorne. Foolish child! to cast away yourself upon the first suitor who chances along—"

Lifting miserable eyes to hers, I said,—

"Will you tell me truly, are you the woman who spoiled so many years of *his* life—were you once called Ciria Pope?"

Her face changed slightly, and her colour was heightened as she answered,—

"You have probably heard a garbled story from old Deborah—Jasper Hawthorne would not speak ill of me. Yes, Leslie, I was Ciria Pope, before, to my sorrow, I married Antonio Ferrari; now what do you mean to do. Shall you declare war with me; shall you tell the little you know to your father?"

"That is what I mean to do," I said; "I will not share his home with you, ingrate and thief."

She drew herself up to her extremest height and laughed a soft scornful laugh.

"Go to him dear child, tell him all your story; he will not believe you—he is in his dotage; and, like the king, I can do no wrong."

"At least I can warn him what manner of woman you are."

"I will not try to prevent you," she answered still lightly; "but your folly will recoil upon yourself—and Jasper Hawthorne. One word from me will effectually end your engagement; your bridegroom elect has almost nothing of his own, and if you pursue your amiable plans you will find yourself in the same condition. Be sensible, Lealie, and never think of arraying yourself against me; *my influence over your father is without limit*. There, turn the matter over in your own mind, and let us be friends."

With that she brought me cake and coffee, but I touched neither, and presently I went away to my own room; and Ciris excused me to my father. I lay thinking all that night, and in the morning I wrote to Jasper telling him my bitter story, then, professing ill-health, I kept to my apartment until his reply could reach me. When it did come the sum and substance of it was,—

"You can do no good by creating dissension between your father and Mrs. Banks; although I most decidedly do not advocate friendship between you, I say treat her with courtesy, and if it makes your father happy to believe in his wife's love, why speak? As soon as I can I will take you away from what I feel sure must be a very uncongenial home to you."

The advice was unpalatable, but I felt that Jasper was wiser than I, and because I loved him so dearly was ready to follow it. But you do not suppose I loved Ciris the more that my father forgot even to tap at my door to inquire after my health, and, wicked as it was, I was not without the fear that having once loved Ciria Pope, Jasper could not regard such a plain little thing as myself with any great degree of affection. Just before dinner Ciris came to me herself.

"Well," she said quietly, "may I ask if Mr. Hawthorne has assisted you to your decision?"

"Yes," I said, trying vainly to emulate her marvellous composure; "for my father's sake I will say nothing of your past."

She laughed softly, musically,—

"Thanks, your mercy is overpowering, Lealie; or is it that you see how useless it is to strive against me? *Ma chérie*, I could turn the tables on you beautifully if I chose, but being strong I can afford to be merciful; if you had proved obstinate, *I would have won back the heart of Jasper Hawthorne just by way of punishment*;" then stooping, she kissed me on the brow lightly; regarded her own reflection in an opposite mirror with calmly critical eyes; then with a smile she said,—

"You would be foolish to pit your strength against me; he loved me first, and I have the charm of beauty. Now dress quickly; your father expects you to dinner;" and, feeling utterly subdued, I obeyed.

The week wore by; I was wretched, it seemed to me Jasper would never keep faith with me when he had looked again on that beautiful face; I think Ciris knew my doubt, and took pains to make herself doubly beautiful on the night of his arrival.

I stood in the hall when he and my father drove up to the door, and I saw her go forward to welcome them, looking her loveliest in a white silk gown with violet velvet train, and amethysts flashing about her white throat, in the masses of her hair, about her pretty wrists. She gave one glance of triumph at me as she passed.

I had had no heart to make myself "pretty," and wore only a coral net dress, which Jasper knew well; but as she gave her hand to him, I saw that his dear face did not change, but his eyes went seeking me—poor plain little me. His voice was low and even as he replied to her greetings; then he saw me, and came to my side. In an instant we were alone.

"Why did not you meet me?" he asked in tones of tender reproach, and as I clung to him I answered,—

"Oh, Jasper, are you quite, quite sure you are not ashamed of me?"

"I am sure that I love you—are you satisfied, my little lass?"

CHAPTER IV.

By every means in her power she strove to take him from me, seeming utterly forgetful of her wifehood; but daily, I thanked Heaven, she laboured in vain, for Jasper was like the "deaf adder, and charm she never so wisely" he made no response.

Indeed, I saw a great disgust of her shining now and again in his dark eyes, and once as he held me fast he said "Little one, I love you more with each passing day, and have learned to rejoice that my first love did not become my wife."

She was a strange woman, this Ciris, and I believe she was utterly without principle; totally unscrupulous. In all her life she had striven only to further her own fortune, heedless of the feelings of others; in all her life she had never loved any but herself.

But now, when she found Jasper so cold to her, she longed all the more to bring him to her feet; at first she began her dangerous game for her own amusement, but she was playing with two-edged tools, and in a little while she pursued it with feverish anxiety, until even to herself she was forced to confess that he was more than all the world to her, and his coldness only made her wicked passion flame higher, and I know that he was eager to be gone, and so prevent any *fiasco*.

Not a word did he say to me of Ciris; my Jasper was not the man to tear any woman's reputation to shreds, but I understood, and when he announced his intention of leaving I did not endeavour to dissuade him, and he looked relieved.

It was on the eve of his departure that I stole into the conservatory, hoping that he would spend a quiet hour with me before dinner was announced; but I heard voices, and looking through a white mass of flowers and shrubs saw Ciris and Jasper. Her face was flushed and eager, his totally impassive.

"Do not go," she was saying, "you will leave so terrible a blank behind you—*Jasper, for my sake, stay*."

"You use a queer argument," he answered coldly, "there is none less likely to induce me to prolong my visit—"

"Why do you look at me so cruelly? Oh, if I sinned against you in the past, I have made ample atonement. Won't you forgive me? You loved me once—"

"Not so," he retorted swiftly, "what I called love was merely passionate adoration of your beauty, and the virtues I believed you possessed. I never loved any girl but Lealie; she has my whole heart, and, please Heaven, I hope soon to call her wife."

I turned and fled then with a great joy in my heart, which nothing but the thoughts of my father's misplaced trust could kill.

That night Ciris was very quiet, pleading a head-ache, and my father hovered about her with every sign of love and tenderest care. Finally he insisted that she should go to her own rooms, and finding him resolute, she obeyed.

We—Jasper and I—thought her well at rest as we kissed good-night at the foot of the stairs, but when I reached the first landing I found her waiting me there, and without a word she followed me into my room. She was white as death, and her great grey eyes were almost black with the rage at her heart.

"I both saw and heard," she said, in a very low voice, "and I know that you are fool enough to believe what *he* says, but,

"Man hath but one soul 'tis ordained,
And each soul but one love."

and Jasper Hawthorne *did* love me, despite all that seems contrary. I have the power, I do not lack the will, to bring him back to his allegiance. Rest assured that you shall never bear his name, or reign in my stead."

"You are a shameless woman," I said, hotly, "unworthy of my father's love and trust, and a disgrace to your sex."

She heard me so far in silence, and then saying "You little Pharisee, be warned in time; you may go too far in your insolence to me," she turned

towards the door, where again she paused, and slowly the words dropped from her beautiful lips, "Remember that I will rather kill you than see you Jasper Hawthorne's wife; I will not be thwarted by a mere dusky child, who has not, and never can have, any pretensions to beauty," then slowly she went away, and I was alone with my thoughts.

It had been arranged that my marriage was not to take place for a year, my father urging that I was too young to undertake the cares of wedded life (in this I traced my step-mother's handiwork), but he promised that in October we should go down to Rippledale, and I wondered over Chris's composure as she heard this promise, because there were many there who would well remember her.

I was still more astonished when she informed me that having seen in a daily that the Swiss Cottage was to let, my father had taken it for six months.

"You can't go to Rippledale," I said; "you will be recognized, and my father will learn your identity—he hates deceit."

She laughed softly and blithely.

"I know how to manage my revered husband; and if he is displeased you and Jasper will come in for a share of his displeasure. You have each assisted me in my deception."

That very day, after luncheon, she, perching herself upon dad's knee, said,—

"Charles, I am going to make a confession; but first let me thank you for your goodness in consenting to go to Rippledale. I have quite an affection for the place, although I admit the people bore me horribly."

"You know Rippledale?" said my father, in amazement; "and yet you did not know Hawthorne until he came here."

"I did, and that is part of my confession. Oh, you silly boy to think I never had any lovers but yourself and Antonio. Why, once I was even betrothed to Jasper Hawthorne!"

Her daring took my breath away. It had all the boldness of innocence, and alas! alas! I knew her for what she was. My father held her a little from him as he said,—

"Then you are the woman who deceived him—Chris Pope?"

"Chris Pope, certainly; but it does not follow I deceived Jasper. We quarrelled, that is all; and then I foolishly married Antonio. Love I did not know until I knew you."

But even her soft, seductive tones did not rouse my father from his unpleasant thoughts.

"Why did you not tell me this before?" he asked, slowly.

"Because you never asked me, or even spoke of my past; and then, when I learned of Leslie's betrothal, we thought it best, she and I, to say nothing. We asked Jasper Hawthorne to keep silence too, because—oh, because, you dear, foolish fellow, you are so absurdly jealous, and so unconscious of your own merits."

She was lying to him shamefully; but I did not make any remonstrance. So long as he could be happy in his faith and love should I undecieve him! But the serpent had entered his Fool's Paradise, and as I hastily rose to leave the room he said,—

"I ought to have known! I ought to have known! Jasper Hawthorne is young and handsome; I cannot compare favourably with him. Leslie, you should not have kept this from me."

I felt choking as I answered,—

"Father, what harm is done? Jasper loves only me, and Chris is your wife," then I escaped.

Duly we went down to Rippledale; but it hurt me cruelly to see that dad watched with keen, jealous eyes the meeting between Chris and Jasper, and although her manner was perfection, I knew a doubt of her still lingered in his mind.

Deborah Trimm had, of course, been apprised of our coming, but she was totally ignorant of my step-mother's identity, so that, when she came up with a basket of eggs, I hurried out into the tiny hall to meet her, and beg her to say nothing that might make my father miserable. But fate was against me. Just as I was going to croak the subject the hall door opened, and he entered with Chris.

Just a moment the delicate tints of her face

paled; then, recovering herself with a celerity few can boast, she put out her hand to Deborah. But that worthy creature refused to take it.

"I'm an honest woman," she said, sharply, "and I don't cotton to thieves."

"What do you mean?" demanded my father, loudly. "How dare you insult Mrs. Banks so outrageously!"

"Ask her what I mean; she'll satisfy your curiosity."

Chris laughed softly.

"Poor old Deborah! You hate me as much as ever; but I bear no malice. You cannot help your eccentricity," and touching her forehead significantly she drew my father away.

Deborah, in her anger, would have followed, but I held her with all my force.

"If you love me," I pleaded, "you will spare my father further pain. He loves her, and if it makes him happy to believe in her, let him do so. Oh, Deborah, you should not have spoken before him."

It was a hard matter to persuade her to silence, and she went away muttering to herself that we were all gone mad together.

From that day a change came upon us; Chris, resenting her husband's questions and doubts, broke openly into passion, and gradually she threw off the mask she had worn, until one terrible morning she stood up boldly before him, avowing her contempt of him and her love for Jasper.

I thought he would strike her, his face grew so livid and his eyes so wild, and I ran between, and held him fast.

"Woman!" he cried, "I have loved you to my own undoing; now I wish to Heaven I had never looked on your beautiful, wicked face. Out of my sight before I spoil your loveliness for ever!" But she stood her ground, and he went on, with almost a wail in his voice, "How many times have you sworn to me that I was more than life itself to you?"

Then she laughed, that low, musical laugh I hated because of its mockery.

"And you were so foolish as to believe me. Look at yourself, Charles Banks. Is it possible that so young a woman as I, with such advantages as mine, could love an elderly, bald, prosaic man dearly? It was position and wealth I craved, and you gave me them. Now I would barter both gladly, just for Jasper Hawthorne's love."

He lifted his arm as though about to strike her.

She confronted him with flashing eyes.

"Coward and dotard!" was all she said; but the blow was stayed, and wrenching himself free from my hold he rushed out into the stormy weather.

He did not return until late in the afternoon, and then he had a wild, haggard look which went to my heart.

Chris, contrary to her custom, had ventured out, and had not yet returned; so he came to me for that comfort I was, alas! so powerless to give.

"Leslie," he said, "I have been a blind fool; but she cannot beguile me any longer; she is my wife. Heaven forgive me that ever I put so vile a woman in your mother's place; but, being my wife, I will not put her to open shame. When I left home there was murder in my heart. I believed that Jasper was not so indifferent to her as he seemed, and I meant to punish him for stealing her love from me. I wandered for hours, considering how best to revenge my wrongs, and then I came back by the Manor and I saw them, Jasper and that woman, in close converse. I stole behind them and listened. I heard her boldly and shamefully declare her love for him, and entreat his pity; and not until he answered did I learn how much I had wronged him by my suspicions, or how vile was the woman I call wife. Now, Heaven give me grace to bear my burden, Leslie, forgive me that I half forgot you in my mad infatuation for her," and then his poor head was down upon my shoulder, and he burst into the awful tears of manhood.

From that day he bore no likeness to the father I had known and honoured. He had aged terribly, and all his jovial ways were things of the past. He seemed only to find pleasure in my

society; and Chris was quite content to leave us to our own devices.

He was now most anxious to hasten my marriage, and one day, when she was absent, he sent for Jasper.

"My boy," he said, "I may as well tell you that everything connected with the past is known to me, and I am a broken-hearted man. I wronged my little girl when I brought home a new wife. I think I have wronged her all along; but I want to make reparation whilst I can. I want to leave her safe in your care. When will you marry her?"

"As soon as she will consent. Leslie, when shall it be?"

I answered it was for him to say, and hid my hot face on my father's shoulder.

"Then let us begin the new life with the New Year. You are not afraid to trust me, Leslie? and we can dispense with any unnecessary ceremony. You will be only a poor man's wife—"

"She shall not come to you empty-handed," my father interrupted. "She has been a good daughter all her life, and she never reproached me for my folly, or spoke one word to undermine my faith in the woman whose past was all known to her. So look up, Leslie, and let Jasper see the love in your eyes; you have little need to be ashamed of it, and—and I would much prefer that you should tell your stepmother that the date of your marriage is fixed."

"There is no need," said a soft voice from the doorway, and there stood Chris, looking at us with strange, inscrutable eyes. Her face was ashen white; even her lips were pale; but her manner was composed, and with steady step she came towards us.

"I could not help overhearing my husband's words," she said, addressing me, "and, although I was not called into the council, I offer you my sincere congratulations. May you be more fortunate in love and marriage than I have been. Mr. Hawthorne, you are wise to choose worth and wealth in lieu of mere beauty."

Every word she uttered was meant as a stab to the three listeners; but Jasper looked perfectly unmoved as he replied,—

"You are pleased to compliment me at the expense of my bride, Mrs. Banks; but I can assure you that there is no face on earth which has the charm of hers for me; and of her worth you cannot speak too highly."

She sank into a chair looking from us, and with her great eyes fixed unwaveringly upon him; but he bore her scrutiny well, and with a gesture that had an element of weariness and despair in it, she addressed herself to my father,—

"It was like you to lack courage to tell me of your pre-arranged plans. What can it matter to me when or where Leslie marries? She is free to please herself, and I can only hope her husband's love for her may prove enduring—gold is a power."

"Be quiet!" he cried; "be quiet! My daughter is an angel."

Then, at a sign from Jasper, I rose and followed him.

"She is a devil," he said, "and I read mischief in her eyes; but when you are my wife she cannot have power to harm you."

CHAPTER V.

I was seriously ill; I who had never known more than a passing ailment before; and it was highly improbable that my wedding could take place on the appointed day.

Deborah lamented loudly over this, saying that a marriage postponed was always unlucky, and not even Jasper could convince her of the contrary.

For the first few days of my illness I saw nothing of Chris, for which I was devoutly glad, but at the close of a week she came to me by night and my heart was touched with pity as I looked on the great change in her.

I have reason now to believe she resorted to artificial means to produce the effect she desired, for she was skilful in such matters, and as cunning as the Serpent of the Nile. With a slow, dragging

step she reached my bedside, and there, kneeling, hid her face in the coverlet, whilst sobs shook her beautiful form.

"What is it?" I asked, faintly; "has anything happened, Ciris?"

It seemed for a little while she could not speak, but at last she murmured brokenly, "All is wrong with me; I have wickedly ruined my husband's happiness, and have spoiled my own life. I have been an evil and bitter woman to you, and—now I come praying absolution—Leslie, dear Leslie, try to forgive me, and teach me to be more like you."

I suppose being so ill, I was more impressionable, and although I ought to have been wiser than to trust one who had been so manifestly false, I did not doubt her repentance.

"Why, Ciris," I said, "I am but a poor example to copy, but with all my heart I can say I freely forgive you."

"Plead for me with Charles," she entreated. "I have been carried away by my wicked passions, but I was never quite so bad as I seemed; and even in my worst moods I could not have hurt you. Oh, happy Leslie! to know nothing of the passions which have wrecked my life—by your love for Jasper, by the joy for which you hope, help me to retrieve my past!"

How beautiful she was as she knelt there, all the rich gold of her hair streaming about her shoulders, and her wonderful face a little lifted from her arms; I could not keep back my tears as with feeble hand I touched her.

"Ciris, what I can do to make you happier I will."

She kissed my fingers passionately, then sitting upon the floor, with her head resting against my bed, she said, "Let me tell you my story—I want you to judge me fairly, and I will hide nothing from you. My first recollections are of a shabby little house in London, where we—my father, mother, and I had apartments. We were horribly poor and my parents used to quarrel fearfully. My mother was a beauty, but she had deceived my father with regard to her fortune; he believed he married an heiress, but she had only the sum of three hundred pounds for her dowry, and that went like dew before the sun. Both were improvident, and many a mean shift was made to enable us to appear decently; many a day did I go fasting that I might have the wherewithal to clothe myself. Not until I was left an orphan did I know what it was to live happily, or to go finely clad, and after my bitter experience is there any wonder that I craved for wealth above all things? Jasper Hawthorne loved me, and I promised to become his wife, but I did not love him then; and when he lost all that made him a desirable *parti* to me, I could not keep my promise, having become infatuated with Antonio Ferrari, with whom I eventually fled. But I was not the thief that Deborah Trimm was pleased to call me; the jewels I carried with me were the free gift of Mrs. Hawthorne when she lay dying. My marriage was a most unhappy one; in an incredibly short time Antonio had dissipated his patrimony, and I was thrown penniless on the world. I met your father, and his wealth appealed to my besetting sin—dear Leslie, I need tell you no more; I can only hope to merit your pardon, and by my dutiful affection to Charles to win back his lost regard. Will you ask him—now—to forgive me, and let me atone for my wickedness—it breaks my heart to see him so changed, and to know that it is all my work. Oh, what a wicked woman I have been!" and much more she said in the same strain, weeping all the while, until I could no longer withstand her prayers, and sent for my father, but it was not until I had exhausted myself with entreaties that I could win him to any concession. I believe he hated Ciris now as much as he had once loved her, and only for my sake did he agree to resume the outward forms of marital life.

When he had gone, she sank down by my bed, and for a long while was silent; at last, lifting her head she said—

"Give me some token of your forgiveness and trust; let me be your nurse, dear Leslie—I am not unused to sickness, and I will spare no pains in your behalf," and so earnestly she begged this of me that even against my will I consented,

and from that hour she was installed as my nurse.

But not all her care, nor Dr. Pearson's unflinching attention availed me anything; I grew daily weaker, and it was hard to determine what was my malady.

Ciris was the perfection of an attendant, and I almost hated myself for believing there could be no good in her.

When I was strong enough to talk, I would praise her to my father or Jasper in highest terms; but the one responded briefly, and the other quietly turned the conversation into another channel.

With her own hands she prepared all my food, and in all she did was so tender and patient that my gratitude was growing fast into affection. Ah! I was no match for this Delilah, this queen of actresses. I was a fool to believe that I should understand or be able to compete with her.

Soon the horrible thought came to me that I was being starved to death; no matter how simple or light my diet, no sooner was it swallowed than I was violently sick, and after each paroxysm of pain I was visibly weaker. And when at my very worst Jasper came into my room I began to cry weakly and entreat him feebly to put all thoughts of me from his heart, because now I should never be his wife. I was doomed; and soon I, who loved the light and air, would be hidden away from both.

His face grew white as my own, as he clasped me to his breast, and brokenly begged me not to take away his hope from him. I suppose my weakness had made me selfish, for I, who would ordinarily have died rather than give him pain, reiterated my words, weeping like a weary child.

"For my sake live," he said; "it cannot be that Heaven will only mock me with a dream of happiness. Leslie, Leslie, my life will be utterly wrecked without you!"

That night he and father talked sadly together, and the upshot of their interview was that further advice should be called in. Dr. Pearson confessed frankly he could not discover my true ailment, and he would certainly prefer a specialist to be summoned, also a duly qualified nurse. Afterwards they told me that Ciris objected to this, saying she could not allow anyone to minister to my needs but herself.

"But you will soon be worn out, Mrs. Banks," urged the doctor.

"If it is in Leslie's service I shall not mind," she answered gently.

Nevertheless Sister Magdalen arrived the following day, and was at once admitted to my room; she looked serious as she felt my pulse, and I said,—

"I am going to die."

"Not yet I hope; you are very young, and have all that makes life good. But to-morrow Sir Humphrey Large will be here, and will tell us all that it is necessary to know."

As she was speaking Ciris came into the room; she looked pale, but very lovely in a dainty tea-gown, and as she offered her hand to Sister Magdalen, she said, with that wonderful smile of hers,—

"I do not wish to usurp any of your rights or privileges, nurse, but I do sincerely hope you will allow me to relieve you occasionally. Miss Banks likes me dear her; and, indeed, I am so anxious concerning her that I cannot long remain away," and of course my new attendant made a suitable response.

On the morrow Sir Humphrey Large arrived, and after a very close examination, left the room with Sister Magdalen.

"It is a curious case," he said, "and puzzles me. I cannot to-day say really what is Miss Banks's malady—but it is quite consistent with—"

Here they moved from the door, and I could only hear the low murmur of their voices; but I knew that both physician and nurse already regarded me as one dead, and I was too languid even to weep over my shattered hopes, or Jasper's broken life. Two days later the great physician came again, and his face grew darker as he heard the nurse's report.

"Who prepares her food?" he questioned, sharply.

"Usually Mrs. Banks; sometimes I do, but generally Mrs. Banks gives it to her. She is devoted to her step-daughter."

"There is something I don't like about all this," he went on paying no heed to me, for although I was conscious I lay with closed lids, too weak and spiritless for speech. "I suspect foul play."

"Sir Humphrey, it isn't possible! Why, there is no one in the house who does not love her. What possible motive could there be for such a crime?"

"Heaven only knows; but I am sure that she is being slowly done to death. See, her eyes are opening and although I do not think she understands, it is best to be cautious," and then they went out together, and what thoughts came to me as I lay helpless, speechless upon my bed, I cannot tell you now. I only know I wept weakly over my own pitiable state, and prayed, or tried to pray that Heaven would deliver me out of the hand of my enemy.

That night, as I lay wakeful, Ciris came in; from under my half-shut lids I watched her, because a terrible suspicion was slowly forming in my mind.

"Nurse," she said, softly. "I think Leslie is sleeping and you look so weary—take a little necessary rest. I will stay until Jane brings in the bowl of arrowroot, and if there is any change in our poor girl, I will call you."

Sister Magdalen demurred, but the other insisted, and finally I was left to my stepmother's care. Presently Jane, a new maid, tapped at the door; Ciris rising quickly took the bowl of arrowroot from her, setting it down upon a table outside "to cool," as she said. But when Jane had gone she cast one swift glance towards me, then I saw her deliberately empty some white powder into my food—and I knew then that it was she who was compassing my death.

Closing the door she advanced to me, and lifting me in her arms, tried by tender persuasions to induce me to eat. I was alone with her, and she was merciless. I was weak and shaken by a great fear. I dared not let her guess that I had seen her wicked deed; but I contrived in clumsiest fashion to knock the bowl from her hand, spilling all its contents upon the floor.

She uttered a vexed exclamation; but Sister Magdalen, who had only been down in the adjoining-room, entering then, she made some trivial remark, and went away to prepare me some more arrowroot.

Then with all my little strength I turned on my pillows, saying peevishly, "I will touch nothing that you have not prepared; and, do not leave me alone with her to-night."

The kind face took an expression of alarm.

"Why do you say such things? Is not Mrs. Banks kind to you?"

"I am sick, and sick folks have fancies. In the morning send for Deborah Trimm, if I am alive;" and then I fainted. Nor did I know anything further until I saw Deborah sitting beside me knitting in a most industrious fashion. "Don't leave me any more," I said, "I am afraid of her."

She dropped her work, and looking fully into my eyes, asked,—

"Why? Miss Leslie you'd better trust me."

But Ciris was my stepmother, and if I accused her to Deborah she would certainly charge her with her crime, because with all her heart she hated her; and the exposure would kill my father, who was terribly aged and broken.

So I kept my own counsel, although I would fain have relieved my mind of its burden; but as I persisted in refusing any food brought in by or prepared by Ciris, and my condition in consequence showed some improvement, I saw that Sister Magdalen regarded her with growing suspicion, and Ciris saw it too, and grew desperate. One day, with tears in her eyes, she implored me to tell her in what way she had offended me, and I, remembering that other scene, when she had so cleverly deceived me, made answer,—

"Ask your own heart, there is little need for me to speak. Be warned in time, and do not tempt me to make your crime known; for my

father's sake, "I spare you." She feigned ignorance, but I, goaded to passion by her wickedness and deceit, said, "Let me alone. Do not touch me or come near me. You have all but robbed me of my life. If you persist in persecuting me I will denounce you as my would-be murderer."

"You are mad," she began, contemptuously, when I interrupted.

"Neither mad nor when I upset the bowl of arrowroot into which you had introduced arsenic. I saw you do it!"

She grew very white, and a moment seemed as though she would fall, then with a scornful laugh she said,—

"Do your worst. I defy you to prove your scandalous accusation. Poor Leslie, you are undoubtedly mad. It is not a nurse but a keeper that you need;" and with her eyes fixed wrathfully upon me to the last, she went smiling from the room, and for that day I had peace.

Then Sister Magdalen was placed *hors de combat* with influenza, so that Deborah was my only nurse; and never was there a better.

But she was mortal, and, besides, she was old, so that on the third night she showed decided signs of fatigue, and I implored her to lie down, saying that Jane could remain within call; and finally, feeling she would better able to perform her duties on the morrow she consented.

Jane took up her station behind a screen. She was a good girl, but lumpish, and presently certain stentorian sounds, told me that she had fallen into a heavy sleep, which scarcely anything could break, as she said afterwards, "I must have my sleep out, miss, and a house falling wouldn't wake me."

But I was restless, and courted slumber in vain. The house was so quiet now that the ticking of the clock upon my mantel sounded unnaturally loud and weird, and I suppose because I was so weak I was nervous.

I spoke to Jane, but without effect, and so I lay staring about me, and wishing for the morning, until at last nature began to assert her sway, and I felt my eyelids closing, myself sinking into a dream, when something startled me. It was the sound of a soft, cautious step along the corridor.

I thought of burglars, and lay quaking with dread. Scream I could not, with my heart beating so loudly that I thought it must rouse even Jane.

Nearer and nearer came that stealthy step. It paused outside my door, then the handle gently turned, slowly the aperture widened, and, with her hair all unbound, Ciris entered. She glanced contemptuously at the sleeping maid, and passing her came to my side. She held a phial and a handkerchief in her hand, and as I looked up at her I knew she meant to kill me.

CHAPTER VI.

TERROR deprived me of all power of speech; I could only entreat her by my gaze to show me some mercy. But although I was speechless, I was horribly conscious of every detail of the scene; how that clock ticked—how Jane snored behind that screen! Oh! if Deborah or my father would come! Must I die like this—Jasper! Jasper! am I never to see you any more? Is all our bright dream ended? Save me from this dreadful woman with the smiling lips and burning eyes, the unbound golden tresses from which the white face gleams demoniacally! She sat down upon my bed; I could feel her breath upon my face, the beating of her heart as she leaned over me, speaking in a cruel whisper,—

"You fool to thwart me, to pit your strength against my will, to forget the warning I gave you months ago! Desperate evils call for desperate remedies, and I do not intend to trust my freedom, and my life into your hands. I have come to finish the task I began—to-night you die."

Oh, life was sweet to me! I had love to make it goodly, and the thought of death was hideous. I clasped my hands in mute appeal to her, and she—she laughed. (I try now to believe that in this hour she was mad, and so irresponsible for her deeds.)

Uncorking the phial she began to pour its contents upon the handkerchief she carried, and having done this, she whispered,—

"Now sleep; and let your sleep have no awakening."

I believe in her madness she totally forgot the presence of the somnolent Jane, and alas I knew how vain would be any attempt to rouse her. With the strength of despair I thrust the handkerchief aside; she gripping my hands fiercely with her left, sought to place it over my mouth and nose. Then followed a dreadful, silent struggle, which left its mark upon me for many months, and which I cannot even now recall without a shuddering horror. I was momentarily growing weaker, my strength would soon be spent, and then—then my enemy must triumph. Surely Heaven heard the wild prayer of my heart, for suddenly the door was flung open, and Deborah entered, lithe, active, her eyes ablaze with sudden hate and rage. She struck Jane a smart blow across the face as she passed, and leapt like a panther towards Ciris.

"You devil!" she cried, and caught her back from me; she was little and lean, and old, but she was very strong; they wrestled together, the beautiful fiend, magnificent in her grace and power—the faithful old friend and servant; and Jane, awakened by Deborah's blow, frantically shouted murder as she ran out into the corridor.

Then came the rush of many feet; my father was first to enter, and behind him was Sister Magdalen, just risen from her bed; and I gave a sob of utter relief, and with that my speech returned to me. Was there ever another woman like Ciris, I wonder; for the world's peace I hope not. With a superb gesture she flung Deborah aside.

"The woman is mad," she said; "I call upon all to witness her attempt upon my life."

"Why," began Deborah, aghast at such a charge, "how dare you lie in such a fashion? I wonder that Heaven allows you to live; but for me Miss Leslie would be now a corpse."

And then I spoke.

"Deborah has told the truth. Ciris, I can shield you no longer."

Sister Magdalen, stooping, picked up the handkerchief; it bore the name of Ciris Banks; the phial, which had fallen to the floor, was labelled poison, and had been purchased from the only chemist the neighbouring town boasted.

"I am afraid these are only small evidences of your guilt," she said. "Mr. Banks, will you take charge of these?"

He shrank back.

"Give them to me," said Deborah, "I am safe."

Then Ciris, drawing herself to her full height, pointing a contemptuous finger to my father, said,—

"Look at him, the coward, who would let an innocent woman bear the burthen of another's crime, that he might rid himself of her! But I am not vanquished yet; my word is surely of as much worth as the ravings of a lunatic girl, and the evident malice of an ignorant old woman. Let those who share in the conspiracy against me look well to themselves."

Then all grew dark about me; faces faded, voices grew indistinct, and for a blessed time I knew nothing, felt nothing. It was morning when I recovered consciousness, and Deborah was seated beside me, looking very alert. In a moment it all rushed back to me, and clutching her by the arm I weakly implored her not to leave me alone.

"You are safe enough now, my precious," she said, "have no fear. And presently, when you are feeling stronger, and I have made you pretty you shall see Mr. Jasper. Oh, poor wasted wrists how bruised they are; but a little arnica will soon get rid of the ugly marks."

"Deborah," I interrupted, "where is she?"

"In Thistlewaite prison," she answered with grim satisfaction.

"Oh, she must be released, for father's sake. The exposure will kill him."

"Not so! it is he who charged her, and now it is to be hoped she'll get her deserts, the false, murdering White Witch. Look here, Miss Leslie, its no use you exciting yourself about it; the

case is out of your father's hands—and the police have found a quantity of arsenic in one of her drawers; Sister Magdalen and Sir Humphrey Large (to whom the Sister telegraphed) say that your symptoms were those of poisoning; they were only waiting to be quite sure before they spoke; and more than that the Thistlewaite chemist swears that the lady he served repeatedly with arsenic 'for her complexion' is Mrs. Banks. You must let matters take their own course now, and I for one am glad she is found out!"

But I could not but pity that wretched woman brought so low, and of my father I dared not think then. Presently I asked,—

"How did you come so opportunely to my rescue, Deborah; I am quite sure I made no outcry."

"No, poor dear; you were too far spent. It was like this: I was that weary I fell asleep almost as soon as I laid down on my bed, and without removing my clothes; but I was anxious about you, and not certain of Jane taking good care of you, so, as soon as I slept I dreamed. They were only restless, bothersome dreams at first; but presently they grew full of trouble and danger, and the last was awful. I saw her gripping your throat, and the life going out of you, and I woke all in a cold sweat. It was all so real that I sprang up to come to you, and—well, miss, you know the rest; only it was a Heaven-sent dream; but for it you never would have lived to hear me tell the tale, for Jane is a fool, and not worth her salt as a nurse," with which sweeping assertion she closed the subject.

A week had gone by; fresh evidence had been discovered against Ciris, and in the minds of the people there could be not the slightest doubt of her guilt.

She had kept a diary, and in this was found the record of her life, the daily commentaries upon my condition, the doses administered, the confession of her disappointment as I began to recover.

It was all very awful, and more awful still was the letter written by a cousin of Antonio Ferrari, stating her belief that he had not died a natural death. Everything connected with his decease had been so strange and mysterious.

The lawyer who was to have conducted her case declined to act for her, and when Ciris heard this I suppose she lost all hope. However that may be, she fell to the floor in a swoon, and was afterwards so ill that she was removed to the infirmary.

In the evening the doctor saw her again. She was quite herself with regard to the gracious composure of her manner, and replied quietly to his questions, even thanking him for his kindness and attention.

After he was gone she asked for pencil and paper, and having written a few words, thrust the slip beneath her pillow; then, saying she was sleepy, laid her head upon her arms and seemed to rest.

Much later an attendant, thinking she lay unnaturally still, went to her, only to find her dead.

In her misery and despair she had strangled herself with her handkerchief, and the written words, which were her last, read,—

"Thus I defy you all."

So she died as she had lived—impenitent, unremorseful. May Heaven have mercy on her soul.

Her end was a terrible shock to my father, although he felt that she had escaped from a life worse than death; and he was so broken that even before I could be moved he was compelled to leave Rippledale and travel to Madeira.

At my earnest request Jasper went with him, and it was arranged we should be married on their return.

When I was sufficiently recovered, Deborah and I started on a tour by ourselves through the southern counties. For a little while Rippledale was hateful to us both. And as the year advanced, strength returned to me, and fresh courage. Then, too, I had Jasper's comforting letters concerning my father, who, indeed, seemed, from his own account, to be recovering tone, so that all looked bright for me as the time of their return drew near.

It was a glorious day at the close of August, and I sat in the verandah of the pretty cottage I had hired at Seaview.

Deborah and I were tired of our wanderings, and proposed to rest at this little seaside village until our travellers arrived, which they proposed to do in the middle of September.

I was utterly idle; the evening was too divine either for work or reading; I was almost too lazy even for thought, being more than content in watching the shifting clouds of rose and amber in the sea-green sky, and the broadening track of ruddy light which the setting sun made across the quiet ocean.

"Such a tide which moving seems asleep,
Too full for sound and foam."

And the scent of old-fashioned, sweet flowers came towards me on the soft west wind.

It only wanted Jasper's presence to complete my happiness; and I felt somewhat vexed when Deborah said behind me,—

"You're wanted, miss; there are two men asking to see you on business," and waiting no reply, she disappeared.

The verandah was at the rear of the house, and not a glimpse of the road could one catch from it; that was why it was such a favourite resort with me, consequently I had not seen the approach of my unwelcome guests, whom I went to meet in such leisurely fashion.

The large, low drawing-room was in semi-darkness when I entered; but instinct told me whose was that tall figure looming out against the casement, but I could not go to meet him. Perhaps he guessed why, for he came at once to me, and without a word, took me in his arms.

With a little apologetic cough, my father vanished through an opposite door, and we two who loved each other more than life, or wealth, or any gift the world can bestow, were alone together.

"My beloved! my beloved!" said the voice, which alone made music for me "is it really the old Leslie? Come to the window that I may see in what way the months have changed you;" and then his dear eyes were peering into my face. "You are graver, my sweetheart, than you used to be; but I miss nothing of the truth and love that made me long to call you wife. Darling; Heaven has been very good to us, our weeping endured for a night, but with morning our joy has come."

I clung to him.

"And you are sure, quite sure, you don't repent your bargain? I am a sorry little thing to have won your love; and I am not gay as I used to be before—before—"

"Your long illness and terrible experiences? But so that your heart is loyal I ask nothing more."

A spice of my old impudence returned to me then, as lifting my head from his shoulder, I said,—

"But there is still one insuperable barrier to our union—it is of your own making—Jasper, I am still an heiress, and you object to marrying money."

"Her impertinence was dormant only!" he said, *sotto voce*, and with mock reproof. "But bonny Leslie, the barrier was not insuperable; thanks to your father, I pushed my invention through and patented it—it is a success."

"And you did not tell me, though you knew how glad I would be."

"I wanted to bring you a great surprise; and, remembering in the old days that you never read 'those awful newspapers,' I felt that my secret was safe. There is every prospect now that I shall win back the Hawthorne estates, provided, of course, that the owners of the several properties will sell, as I can buy; and all this is due to your father." I was struck with remorse at my forgetfulness of him, and slipping from Jasper's held said, "Let me go to him, I have forgotten him too long."

I found him in the little ante-room.

"Dear," I said, "love has made me selfish; but I will not sin again in like manner."

Deborah had lit the lamp, and now as its light fell full upon his face, I saw an old and worn man—old before his time—with marks of suffering graven on his brow and about his mouth.

His cheeks had fallen in, and his hair was white as snow. There was nothing left of his old jovial manner, as with a touching gesture he drew me to his side.

"My dear, my dear," he said, brokenly, "I am a changed man; but in pity for my sufferings do not hold me less in esteem and affection;" and, with my arms about his neck, I vowed with tears to love and cherish him all my life through. Then I ventured to ask,—

"Is it for her you grieve?"

"Heaven forgive me, no! I cannot remember her without a shudder. I was made mad by her beauty and her wiles; but when I learned how bitterly she had deceived me, and contrasted her falsehood with your mother's truth, I loathed her, and hated even the sight of her wonderful beauty. Now, Leslie, give the old man a corner by your hearth, and a place in your heart, and he will ask no more."

Before the close of September we were married, and Deborah's prophecy was not fulfilled. I had a smart maid now; but I would not hurt my good friend's sensitive heart by allowing any save herself to assist me with my toilet on that eventful day.

It was a quiet wedding: I had not even a bridesmaid, because, owing to the roving life I had led with my father, and the following seclusion of Rippendale, I had not so much as a girl-friend.

But we were very happy as we set off on our jaunt, leaving dad to Deborah's care; and on our return to England we did not go to my husband's home on account of the sad memories it had for father; but we took a house near Hampton-hill, and there we lived until two children came to increase our happiness, and to wean "grandpa" from sad thoughts of the past.

Then, slowly, he sank, and peacefully passed away, holding my hand to the last in his failing grasp; and we buried him (at his request) by my mother.

That is years ago now—I am afraid to tell you how many—and with love has come prosperity and fame.

Jasper is universally courted now, and no prouder woman lives than his homely little wife, who, in her husband, finds her lover, stronger, truer, tenderer every happy day she spends by his side.

Little by little he is winning back his lands; but it rejoices me exceedingly that the Swiss Cottage has been burned to the ground, for now I have no constant reminder of Ciris and her awful end, of all the tragedy that preceded it, and for this I am devoutly thankful.

Deborah still lives, and is never tired of telling my two girls of the happy chance which brought mamma and luck to Hawthorne Manor.

THE END.

A BRAVE HEART.

—30:—

CHAPTER XXIX.

JUSTINA having arrived at the determination to leave Croomehurst without further delay, had set her mind to work to arrange her movements, to sketch out her departure, and all that surrounded it.

She decided to go immediately. Her great trouble was how she might best announce her determination to Molly and to Sir Basil.

At first the idea had come to her, as we have seen, to steal quietly away without chancing a spoken farewell, or putting herself to the pain of refusing to be urged or dissuaded; but as she sat thinking and thinking, Justina grew to see that this was an impossible and a wrong plan.

Go she would, most certainly, but she would go openly, taking a temporary farewell of her two beloved friends, and leaving them with the hope that before long she might return to be near them. That she never would return was a thought and decision she must lock away in her own heart, as part of her secret self.

Yes, the more she pondered the more imperative was it in her eyes to do everything straightforwardly, very quietly, but openly. There should be no mystery in her movements; all she would do would be to tell Molly that for many, many reasons she had resolved upon leaving Croomehurst, and she felt well assured that when Molly saw how much her mind was set on this, there would be no objection urged or entreaty made to her to change her plans.

"And to help me in all this there is but one thing I must do," Justina said to herself, wincing at the suggestion even as she said it in her thoughts, "I must accept Aunt Margaret's proffered friendship. I must put my own feelings on one side, and accept the invitation she made me when first she came down here. It will be hard, very, very hard, for between Aunt Margaret and myself there is a great gulf fixed that no affection or sympathy will ever bridge over; but in this case I must not think only of myself. If I leave Croomehurst hurriedly or secretly, it will throw a kind of discredit upon Basil and Molly. They brought me here; they are in a sense responsible for me. I must never do anything that will be disagreeable to them. Aunt Margaret is the only way open to me now. By going away with her I shall silence all gossip, and set myself right with those two of whom I must think most now. I am afraid," Justina mused, and smiling a faint, wan smile at the thought, "I am afraid Aunt Margaret will not be at all pleased at being taken at her word; she made the offer with a good show of sincerity, but she never imagined I should lose my independence, and forget all that has gone just to accept her hospitality. I must prepare myself to be misunderstood in this, for a time at least. When once I am away from here, and all has been done in the right manner, I shall not trouble Aunt Margaret or anyone else for any length of time. I shall try and let her understand this as early as I can, and now I must not lose another moment in writing to her, for she leaves immediately I know, and I must go when she goes."

Justina was considerably surprised and a little touched, it must be confessed, by the eagerness and warmth with which her aunt responded to her request.

Lady Sartoris answered her note in person.

"Can you arrange to leave with us to-morrow, dear Justina? you know we must go without fail to-morrow, and it is very short notice for you, especially when you are far from strong, my poor child."

"I shall be quite ready," Justina said, gently, not having a grain of worldliness in her, she could not, of course fathom the real meaning of Lady Sartoris' warmth. She received it as a proof that her aunt possessed after all some great and good qualities, a womanliness of heart and feeling of whose existence hitherto she had never known. She was, as we have just said, deeply touched by this unexpected revelation of affection and sympathy, which was full of seeming sincerity and depth.

"I was about to propose this very thing when your note was brought to me, my dear!" Lady Sartoris declared. "I am only too delighted, my darling child, that you have decided to come to me, it is wisest in every sense of the word, and I am delighted, delighted!"

"I shall not trespass on you longer than I can help, Aunt Margaret," Justina said a little hurriedly. Though it was impossible for her to have described why it was so, the fact remained, that after the first feeling of gratitude to her aunt's prompt response had worn off, a slight jarring sensation remained behind, and seemed as if it were likely to remain.

It was well for Justina's peace of mind that her aunt's true thoughts were not fully revealed. To have had to realize that the secret that had been so tender, so beautiful, albeit so sad, had been gauged and estimated in the most practical fashion by Lady Sartoris, would have been little less than torture to Justina's proud heart.

She was so truthful, so sincere herself, she could not possibly comprehend the workings of such a mind as that possessed by her aunt; to have known that her future was already allotted her, and that schemes and plans for Lady

Sartoris' own children were being built, also, on the glories of this future, would have been an absolute degradation of her highest feelings to the girl whose dignity was greater, if possible, than even the gentleness and courage that marked out her character as superior in the truest sense of the word.

Justina tried to overcome this jarring sensation that had followed so quickly on the more pleasant emotion. She attributed it to the fact that there was in reality no true sympathy between herself and her aunt, no mutual comprehension.

"No doubt I am as much to blame for this as she is," she said to herself. "I have lived so long by myself I have grown selfish and difficult. One thing is very certain, Aunt Margaret has the kindest intentions; if she fails a little in carrying them out must I blame her for that? I must instead be most grateful to her for making the present moment so much easier for me to arrange."

"I shall not trespass on your hospitality for very long," she said out loud, but Lady Sartoris would not listen to this.

"My home is open to you for as long as you desire, Justina," she said enthusiastically. To herself she added, "and that will not be very long if I am a good judge of a man's nature. What an innocent creature she is to be sure! There is no doubt she has not so much as begun to think of the life that is coming; were it anyone else but Justina, I should be tempted to doubt the genuineness of this innocence; but she is sincere, she has no more worldliness in her than a flower, or a stick, or a stone, and it is just this sort of girl who has the treasures of this world flung at her feet!"

"What benefit will her riches and position be to her? She will develop into a dowdy country squires, given up to good works and the care of her children—so far as ambitious, social wisdom goes, I cannot help thinking Basil Fothergill makes a great mistake when he passes over that handsome Leam Greatorex to set my niece at the head of his house; but after all they will be very well suited, for both are dull, earnest, heavy sort of individuals," and then Lady Sartoris gave a sigh of envy as she looked at Justina's delicate loveliness, enhanced to perfection by the simple gown she wore.

"With her youth and that face what might she not attain? Things are shamefully unequal in this world. Justina's beauty might just as well have been bestowed on one of my girls; there would have been a value and a meaning to it then. Well, there is no use in wasting thoughts on this sort of thing. The work of the moment is to cement this affection between Justina and ourselves, so that in the future we may derive what benefit we can from her position and wealth."

Naturally being, as she was, an exceedingly astute individual, Lady Sartoris did not intend to allow any of her ambitious desires to creep out in her manner now. She professed herself only eager to help Justina out of her affection and to the fullest extent of her power. The subject of Rupert Seaton's death was not even mentioned between them until just before her ladyship rose to go, and then it was Justina who introduced it.

"There is one thing I have not yet told you, Aunt Margaret, and this is that I have resolved to pay a short visit to Paris as early as I can. I want," Justina said, her sweet voice very low, "I want to see the place where they have buried poor Rupert; it is my duty, and not for myself alone, but for his mother to whom I must write all."

"Oh! you can arrange your visit quite easily, my dear," Lady Sartoris replied, not having however the smallest sympathy with such an idea. "All I should suggest is to wait till you are a little stronger. You are looking very pale and delicate, you know, and now I am going to drive up to the Hall. Would you like me to tell Miss Fothergill what we have just settled?"

Justina assented at once.

"And will you ask her, please, to try and see me for half-an-hour this afternoon?" she said, gently.

Lady Sartoris drove away on the whole well satisfied with the arrangements just made. It was her custom to go with the rising wave and find a benefit to herself in everything and everybody. Justina as plain Justina Seaton was certainly not a desirable connection, nor could she be of any assistance whatsoever, but Justina as Lady Fothergill was quite another individual, and with this future standing so clearly before her, there was nothing in reason Lady Sartoris would not undertake to do for her niece.

"Blood is thicker than water," she had said to the girl as she kissed her before they separated. "After all I am the proper person to take care of you, Justina, and have a place in your life now."

Justina remained standing by the fire looking into its glowing depths as her aunt drove away.

"She is very kind," she said to herself in a hurried kind of manner. "I have misjudged her, I have wronged her. She is sympathetic and kind, has she not proved this conclusively to-day?"

And yet there still lingered that odd feeling of dissatisfaction, that sort of presentiment that this generosity and kindness had yet to be put to the test to be shown at its real worth.

Justina woke from her thoughts after awhile.

"The moment has come. I am to go. I have no time to lose. I must gather my things together, and I must tell Janet. It will be very hard to part with Janet and my little home. I have grown fond of it all. It has been part of a very sweet story, the only home I have known since Daddy went."

She spent the next few hours gathering her things together. Janet had heard her decision with sincere regret.

"I hope ma'am, if ever you should need my services you will always let me know. It is a pleasure to serve you, Mrs. Seaton. I wish I could remain on with you now."

"I wish so, indeed, far, far more than you can know, Janet," Justina said warmly, earnestly. "but, alas! it is not possible. It may be I shall never again have another little home. Most surely I shall never have such another home as this has been!"

"Miss Molly will grieve terribly about your going, ma'am," Janet said a little while later.

Justina remained silent, she was very busy putting her clothes and small belongings into her boxes. Everything was arranged in order. Her little store of money was used to settle up all that was owing for the rent of the house and Janet's wages.

She would go away with barely a pound left for herself but then she would set to work again immediately, and more would be earned. This was not a trouble to her. When Molly came she burst in on Justina like a whirlwind.

"It is not true, Just. Tell me it is not true you are going away to-morrow with your aunt? She has just told me so, but I will not believe her—I will not believe it unless you tell it to me with your own lips."

"It is quite true, darling," Justina said, coming forward with outstretched hands, and her face pale and nervous.

Molly took her hands and they sat down together on the sofa side by side.

"Why are you going? Why are you running away from me? You know you will miss me dreadfully. You know you will never be happy with Lady Sartoris."

"I know all that," Justina confessed, a wan smile breaking the shadows of her face for an instant. "I know it all too well."

"And you still persist in going?" Molly cried, holding the small hands very tightly.

Justina answered evasively.

"Have I not always intended to go sooner or later, and have we not agreed a long time ago that it was right and proper in every sense that I should go with Aunt Margaret?"

"Oh! don't throw that against me, Justina," poor Molly cried, exasperated by the knowledge that she had indeed been the first to start this idea. "You know—you know," she broke off again.

It was a very delicate position. How could she speak out all that was crowded into her

heart, and yet to let Justina go out of her keeping, to see this new and heavy shadow fall on the golden gleaming hopes that had sprung up so quickly and so naturally, was something for which Molly was not quite prepared. It was hard, too, to bring forward any real tangible objection to this decision. After all it was wiser for Justina to leave Croomhurst for a time, and no arrangement could possibly have been made better than the one that she should go under her Aunt's chaperonage.

The fact is, however, that by some occult reason the truth that had been confessed by Justina in the secret of her own heart had managed to convey itself to Molly's sympathetic comprehension, and she saw beyond the outward bearings of this move into the realms of the future, beyond that future which would not be that joyous happiness her love had sketched out for her brother and for this girl, but would stretch on in the same cold gloom of disappointment and despair as had lived with them these months past.

When the news of Justina's freedom had been confirmed Molly had not stopped to guess what would happen in the immediate future—it had been only the knowledge that there would be a future after all that had filled her every thought, and now by one quiet touch Justina had awakened her out of her dreams and brought her face to face with the fact that the time of her brother's sorrow and heart's despair was not by any means at an end.

It is a strange thing that something of this had not dawned earlier in Molly's mind while making her calculations, but most certainly it had not done so, and it had escaped her to remember the nature of the girl she desired so earnestly to call her sister.

Poor Molly was quite downcast. She sat very silent as Justina gave her all the arrangements that had been made. She did not know what to do, what to say in this moment. The days were too early to speak of Basil and his hope, and yet Molly's disappointment and dread grew and grew as she listened to Justina speaking.

There was no need of words to tell her what determination lay beyond this conventional departure. It was not a temporary farewell Justina was taking, it was to be farewell for ever, farewell to Basil's happiness and the beautiful life she had sketched out for him, farewell even to the pleasant friendship that had been so sweet to them all.

"You will give me one promise before you go, Justina?" she asked when she could find her voice at last.

Justina's lips were pale as she answered.

"There is nothing that is possible in my power you need ask me twice to do for you, Molly."

Molly kissed her softly.

"It is this," she said, "I want you to give me your promise that if I have need of you—if I should be ill."

Justina stopped her hurriedly.

"Oh! dearest, dearest, kindest, truest friend, do not even put this thought into words. Surely you know you must know, that I am yours always. Always yours, even though fate should seem to set us apart."

Molly's eyes were full of tears, but there had come too a faint lightening of the disappointment that had been so overwhelming a few moments ago.

"I must give her time. It is not possible for her to do anything else but go away. It is all too early, but in a little while, in a month or so, it may all be well. I will not let myself think otherwise, it would be too dark, too sad."

She tried to view the matter cheerfully.

"You are not our only deserter, Justina. Fancy, Lord Dunchester is leaving the end of this week. After the storm the calm, and it will be a calm with a vengeance once these theatricals are well over. I don't know what we shall all do with ourselves. Don't be surprised, Justina, if I come flying after you."

Justina pressed the hands she held.

"You have duties here, you will not desert them, or—or—Basil."

Molly did not answer immediately. She never

remembered to have felt so depressed and melancholy in her life before.

"Oh! yes. I shall try and stick to my duty always," she said, as lightly as she could after a little while; "but I shall miss you, terribly—terribly, you dear, pretty, lovely Just; and—"

Molly did not finish her sentence; but somehow Justina understood her.

"Why is he going, Molly?" she asked, softly.

"Because I told him he ought to go."

Molly's voice was a little muffled.

"And where is he going—not very far?"

"To Ireland. He has property there, you know, and he has let it go to rack and ruin for want of proper looking after. I believe he is going to turn farm-labourer or something."

Justina smiled faintly at this. Molly's face and voice were so wibegone.

"You ought to be pleased, darling," she said, very tenderly; "you have always wanted him to do something better than living the lazy, dawdling life he has led for so long; farming is very healthy, too—it will do him great good, I am sure."

"Oh! yes, of course, I know it will," Molly cried, springing to her feet impatiently; "but will you tell me why it is, Justina, that all things that are to bring us good are so disagreeable to do?"

"That is a conundrum beyond me!" Justina answered with another faint smile that ended in a sigh.

Molly was walking to and fro to help her to overcome her emotion.

"Now here is a case in point. You are doing what you consider right, and Philip is going to do what I consider right, and jolly disagreeable it all is I can assure you, as far as I am concerned. You must please excuse me if I sound slangy, Justina, it relieves my temper a little."

"I never knew you had a bad temper, Molly."

"These theatricals have produced it most successfully. Oh! I am so glad they are just over—I am so tired of everybody; and the only good thing I can see out of Philip's going away at this moment is the fact that he will be cut off altogether from that man St. Leger. I don't know why it is for he is more than civil to me, and what I should have done without him I don't know; but it is a fact, I cannot endure him."

Molly had worked herself up into a red heat—it was an unconscious relief to her feelings. There was so much that was surging in her brain and heart it did her good to find some vent in which to let a little of her agitation and conflicting emotion escape.

She walked about the room, busying herself in gathering Justina's things together and packing them in the trunks.

"If you will go I may as well make myself useful," she declared, and Justina made no remonstrance.

The conversation drifted into many grooves, and the two girls folded and packed, and were very busy, so busy that Molly had no time to reflect on what she had said, and no hint or suggestion came to her to whisper that by those strong denouncing words she had struck a final blow to any hope there might have been for Basil.

In her anger against St. Leger—in her fierce contempt for him and his class—Molly had forgotten that the man whom Justina had married had been a worse specimen of the gentleman adventurer than the present object of her wrath, and that the shame and degradation he had brought on himself would be claimed now by this pale, beautiful young creature, whom Basil loved better than his life, but who by reason of this dead man's sin and shame had decided to stand apart and away from Basil's love, and the happiness that would have been hers in that love until the grey cold spectre of death crept up to her heart, and her sorrow and humiliation was ended in the silence of the grave.

CHAPTER XXX.

Spring came to deck Croomehurst with brave array. Molly declared there never had been such a beautiful spring.

"The flowers have come so profusely on purpose for your wedding, Bee," she said one lovely April day, "but I am glad you are going to wait till June, I hate a wedding in May."

"I wanted to wait for ever so long," Bee said demurely, although she blushed as she spoke, "but Jasper was so obstinate."

"I like an obstinate man," Molly said, but she spoke rather mechanically, as if her thoughts were wandering from the subject, as indeed they were.

"Well, you ought to like Jasper very much," said Dr. Wyllie's pretty fiancée. The two girls were walking in the garden, Molly with a large pair of scissors and a stout, square basket. Twice every week, as regularly as the clock, she sent a message of flowers to Justina, boxed up in that small house in a small street out of Mayfair.

"I am going to write to Mrs. Seaton very soon, I want her to come to my wedding," Bee Somerset observed after awhile, and several clusters of sweetest lilies had been broken off the heavily laden tree to be placed in the basket. Molly's face suddenly glowed.

"Bee, you are an angel."

Miss Somerset looked mystified.

"But why, Molly?" she enquired.

"Because, my dear, you have solved a most difficult problem." Molly plucked another lily spray, and her eyes were full of light.

"Do you think she will come, Molly?"

"I am sure if you ask her in your most charming way she cannot refuse, and, oh! Bee, I do so want her to come here."

"But why don't you ask her?" exclaimed Miss Somerset, in the most natural way possible.

Molly shot a glance at her out of her brown eyes.

"Now, Bee, don't be a goose. As if I had not simply worn myself to death writing and asking her to come. Justina, you see, is like Dr. Wyllie, a very obstinate person, and when once she has taken an idea into her head, nothing will move it out again. She happens to have taken an idea this time about not coming here for a long, long while, and the result is she is driving me into a lunatic asylum!"

"Poor Molly!" Bee laughed, and then her face grew more grave. "You are quite right to be disappointed, for Mrs. Seaton is such a sweet thing. Jasper says when he called to see her the other day she looked so pale, and not at all strong. I don't see how she can be happy with Lady Sartoris and those two stupid girls. I shall write her the very moment I get home, and I shall ask her to come and stay with us. Daddy will be delighted; he fell in love with her, you know."

Molly packed away some more flowers before she spoke again.

"Have you heard from Leam?" she asked, when she did speak.

Bee nodded her head.

"I had a letter this morning. She told me she saw Sir Basil as he was passing through London on his way to Ireland. I suppose he will not stay long with Lord Dunchester. You know I positively cannot be married without Sir Basil at my wedding."

"What a consequential little person to be sure; one would think your wedding was absolutely the most important event in the whole world!"

Molly pinched Bee's flushed, pretty face as she spoke, and Miss Somerset replied audaciously,—

"Well, so it is, Molly, to me you know."

"Oh! well you need not be afraid; Basil will be back in plenty of time, and will bring Ph—the Earl with him. I fancy we shall hardly know Lord Dunchester when we see him, he has turned so industrious."

"Daddy says he is acting very wisely; it is the only way to make Irish property pay to look after it yourself."

Molly laughed softly to herself, and there was a glow on her cheek for a moment or two.

"We will go and have this fastened up, and then I will take it to the post; if you are not busy you can come with me."

Bee expressed her delight, and they walked towards the house.

"Did Leam tell you she had been to see

Justina?" Molly inquired, as they crossed the lawn.

Miss Somerset came to a standstill for a moment, and stared at Molly in the most supreme amazement.

"Leam been to see Mrs. Seaton? why, Molly, how funny!! I thought Leam could not bear poor Mrs. Seaton. Don't you remember how rude she was at the rehearsal that day?"

"Remember! I don't think I shall ever forget it, and, as a matter of fact, it is that very thing that has been the reason of Leam's visit, she told Basil about it. I can read in his letter he was a little touched, for, after all, Leam is not what one would call a gracious person, and for her to have to confess a wrong and make an apology is something really tremendous!"

Miss Somerset stared at Molly.

"Is that what she did? but I don't understand it; it is not a bit like Leam; what could have made her do it, Molly?"

"The knowledge that she had been exceedingly and unjustifiably rude. Basil says she spoke quite plainly to him, and that she had always desired to make an amende to Mrs. Seaton, only she had never been able to find a chance."

"Why she could have done so over and over again before Mrs. Seaton went away," exclaimed pretty Bee; "in fact I wondered why she did not make some effort to show Mrs. Seaton how much she regretted her harsh and rude words."

"Well, better late than never!" Molly answered. "You must remember Leam is not like we are, made up of impulses and haste; she does things deliberately, so of course she wanted more time than we should to act as she has just done. Does Leam say when she is coming back from town?"

"In a week or two. Molly, I cannot get over the fact of Leam making an apology to Mrs. Seaton, it doesn't sound real!"

"Well, I had it from Basil, and he never invents anything!" Molly said a little drily.

"Oh, of course not; only"—Miss Somerset came to a stop. The remembrance of all the many times when Leam's objection to Molly's lovely young friend had been expressed to her rose up in the girl's mind, and she was puzzled accordingly. She changed the subject.

"Did Sir Basil tell you how Mrs. Seaton was looking, Molly?" she queried.

"Basil did not see her; he was most unlucky. He called three times, and each time Justina was not at home."

They had arrived at the Hall by this time. Molly went in quest of a string; she did not want Bee to notice the disappointment and pain that would gather over the bright face as she remembered her brother's quiet, sad letter, and realized only too well that her fears concerning Justina's parting from them were founded on fact not fancy.

"You shall write a label, and we will take this to the post-office without delay. I have to call and inquire after Lady Gertrude also. I wonder if Leam knows how very unwell her mother is? I think Dr. Wyllie ought to write and tell her, Bee."

"Leam will come home when she wants to, not before," Bee said quietly. It was wonderful how the glamour of her old infatuation for Leam had worn utterly away, and how the pretty, fairy-like child had grown to recognize the true from the untrue, the dross from the gold. "I expect she must be enjoying herself with her friends in London. I wonder if Leam will ever marry, Molly?"

Molly frowned unconsciously. Why it was so she could not have explained satisfactorily; but whenever the subject of Leam Greatorex's future arose she felt a little uncomfortable and annoyed, as though in some way she were to blame for the fact that Basil had not fulfilled the Croomehurst expectations and made Leam his wife.

"Why should she not marry?" she asked almost sharply.

Bee shrugged her shoulders.

"I don't know, only she is so odd; one would have supposed she would have been married long ago, but you see she is not;" and then Miss Somerset laughed. "Molly, do you know I always believe that Mr. St. Leger must have



"WELL, YOU OUGHT TO LIKE JASPER VERY MUCH!" SAID BEE SOMERSET.

proposed to Leam once. Can you imagine such a thing! but the first night of the theatricals Jasper saw them talking together quite confidentially, and then afterwards Mr. St. Leger escorted Leam down the avenue to find her carriage. Of course I know it sounds like madness, when we remember what Leam is; but after all he did admire her immensely, and I don't think Mr. St. Leger was troubled with much shyness!"

"Bee, you ought to take to writing romance, your imagination is magnificent!"

"Well; perhaps I am stupid about this, but to me it is not a bit more astonishing than the news you have given me; fact is certainly stranger than fiction when it is proved that Leam Greatorex has actually made an apology to a woman whom she hated as much as she could hate anything."

"Bee!"

"But it is true, Molly, and you know it is. What I should like to know is *why* Leam did this; and what that dear Mrs. Seaton thinks about the matter."

Justina had not thought very much about it. She had certainly been greatly amazed when one early April morning a little note arrived at her aunt's small over-decorated house, and she read in it a request from Leam Greatorex to grant her an interview.

Justina paused only a moment before she answered this letter. She was too wearied by the toil of her daily work and by the jarring atmosphere in which she had lived since she had left Croomehurst to indulge in much curiosity or questioning as to why this request should be made. She answered it in a few simple, courteous words, and asked Miss Greatorex to call any morning, when she would be glad to see her.

In the morning Lady Sartoris and her daughters were always out, and Justina could therefore make use of the drawing-room for a little while. It was only on very rare occasions she left her own small bedroom.

Life in her aunt's house was fast becoming unbearable.

As the days had passed, Lady Sartoris had dropped the veil with which she had garbed her affectionate interest, and Justina was shown, in plain, unvarnished form, the real reason for her aunt's former display of sympathy and the duty that was expected of her.

She was to marry Basil Fothergill, and that as quickly as possible.

By every sort of hint, Lady Sartoris had given this duty to her niece, and Justina's heart grew cold and sick with pain and disgust for the unblushing haste with which her aunt was trying to get rid of her and put her in a place that was to be as much to the advantage of the Sartoris family as to herself.

Things came to a crisis when Sir Basil arrived in London.

Without a word or an explanation of any sort, Justina took her own course. She denied herself to Sir Basil—denied herself when every fibre of her being was calling out for the comfort, the balm of his tender friendship, his unfathomable love. She left his letters unanswered. She was deaf to her aunt's remarks. She accepted none of the plans arranged for her. She simply remained up in her own room and let the brave, noble, tender-hearted man she loved so dearly be sent away three times without seeing her or touching her hand. She was, indeed, a brave heart; but the war was lasting so long, the fight was so hard, the campaign so full of desolation and hopeless despair.

Was it a wonder Justina was growing tired?

Leam Greatorex's unexpected courtesy and generous confession of wrong against her came at a time when Justina could not resist any soft or gentle thing.

"I want to tell you how sorry I have been for you, and to ask you to give me your friendship, Mrs. Seaton," Leam said, in her stately fashion.

"Do not speak of anything that is past," Justina said, hurriedly.

She took the offered hand.

"I will gladly be your friend if it will give you pleasure," she added, gently.

And then they had talked of other things, and Leam had gathered that Justina would be leaving her aunt immediately, and would be once again alone in the world. Her heart beat holly as she listened.

Would Justina be able to hold out against Basil much longer?

To Leam it was only a question of time. Justina must give way sooner or later, she said to herself, and then the drama of shame and misery which St. Leger had sketched out to her so easily would be commenced.

It was a curious paradox that Leam should have desired nothing so much in this moment as to see Justina begin to break down in her self-elected renunciation of happiness.

The future for her (Leam) was a blank where Basil Fothergill was concerned.

For good or ill, through life and death, this girl had won away his love, and if he could not make Justina his wife then would he have no wife.

This was something Leam knew in all its bitter truth. All, then, that remained to her was to find what solace she could for the tempest of sullen malice, of disappointed ambition, of passions of jealous hatred, in working a harm to the woman who had robbed her.

She was impatient to begin. For this she had done what she had done; for this she had pretended to humble herself. She had begged for Justina's friendship.

It was a traitress's work she had set herself, one that should have debased and degraded her in her own eyes; but in such a mood as this Leam flung all her better qualities to the winds. She was a bitter, disappointed woman, and if love and success were denied her so completely then she would find some substitute for it in the satisfaction of seeing her rival torn from her happiness in the very moment of tasting its sweetness.

(To be continued.)



"I DREAMED THE OTHER NIGHT THAT I HAD FOUND HIM!" SAID JASPER BROOKE, WITH A WILD LOOK IN HIS EYES.

EVANGELINE'S LEGACY.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"TRUST ME!"

EVENING-TIME a few days later—an evening calm, exquisitely serene, with the clear pale blue of the sky overhead mirrored faithfully in the dark depths of the river below, with streaks of pink and primrose and wannest apple-green lying low in the languid west, marking the fair region where the sun had gone down.

For once the roar of the busy mills was hushed; business was slackener now that summer was drawing near. In the glorious woods above the river a nightingale had already begun to flood with his rapturous melody the dusky and unfrequented dells, where the harebells grew in such wondrous profusion and the moss was as richest velvet beneath one's feet.

Gray clouds of insect life hovered thickly over the surface of the stream, and the big fish were on the feed in the close vicinity of the eyots.

Mark Hencastle had changed his dusty clothes, and now sat with the girls in the pleasant old dining-room at the Lower Mills, reading his newspaper by the open window. Presently, having done with it, he flung it aside.

"It's more than a shame to waste such an evening indoors," said he, rising and stretching himself. "Come, Lina—Helen—rouse up, both of you, and we'll go for a row as far as Moss-court or Highcross village. There will be a moon by-and-by, so that if we are a bit late home it won't matter. The Moss-court backwater is lovely by moonlight."

But Helen, who was industriously occupied with her household linen basket, said briskly,—

"Out of the question, my dear boy—at least, for me. It is baking-day to-morrow, and there are other important things to be done always on Thursday. Therefore these things you see here must be attended to and finished to-night. You

take Lina on the river—she'll enjoy it—I'll stay at home, Mark."

Lina was willing, and Mark nothing loath. The arrangement was an eminently satisfactory one to both of them; and Helen, guessing this perhaps, had invented an excuse for remaining home by herself.

Ere long Hencastle had got his skiff out from the boat-house, and was assisting Lina into the cosily cushioned seat at the stern. He took the sculls, and she the scarlet rudder cords; for she had grown quite accomplished in boating affairs since her sojourn in the Hencastles' home.

She wore this evening one of her pretty London gowns—a soft dead-white material, trimmed with lovely lace and old-gold satin. A handsome high-shouldered tippet of Russian sable was her only wrap; it was sufficient on this sweet May night.

They must pass through the lock in order to gain the Moss-court part of the river; but Jasper Brooke, the lock-keeper, they noticed, was not at his accustomed post. In answer to Mark's shout of "Lock—lock—lock!" it was Davy Crockett who appeared on the scene to wind back the huge dripping gates.

"Hullo, Davy, you here?" said Mark. "How's that?"

Davy explained, in his wordy way, that Jasper had gone farther up the river in the Moss-court direction, to look after one or two of his night-lines, and had asked him—Davy—since the mills had stopped working for the day, to mind the Lock for him during his absence.

"So I be here, sir, for a spell," said Davy. "Martha, she's gone to Marley, and it was a bit lonesome like with only the gal Jane at home."

"Jasper is getting a sad poacher in his old age," remarked Hencastle, carelessly. "He had better look out."

"Is it wrong then?" asked Lina anxiously, as the gate closed behind them, and their boat rose higher and higher every moment with the rising, seething, imprisoned water, "to set these night-lines?"

"It isn't altogether right, I suppose," Mark smiled. "But then I fancy old Jasper individually does not do much mischief in that direction. It amuses him, and really harms nobody. Besides, if Sir Philip Wroughton himself does not object to the old chap's poaching in the Moss-court backwater, nobody else round about here has any right to interfere with him."

"Sir Philip may not know," murmured Lina.

"I don't much suspect that Sir Philip would trouble himself if he did know, Lina," replied Mark, his attention just then engrossed with his manipulation of the boat-hook. "There are other poachers in the Moss-court private water besides Jasper, you may be sure. Trout swarm there—as Guy Arminger could tell you—but Sir Philip is too careless to look after and preserve his own."

Lina was silent.

Soon the skiff reached the edge of the lock; and Lina drew her hand through the now deep and eddying water, with an exclamation of relief.

"Mark," she said, "I cannot bear a lock. When we are at the bottom of it I am always somehow reminded of a gigantic coffin—an enormous black slimy coffin!"

"That is a horrible idea," said Mark simply.

"I never shall forget that night," said Lina, with a strong shudder—"never can forget it—when I walked straight in—headlong—ah! it was frightful."

"It is not likely that you would forget it," returned Mark quickly. "Nor shall I, my dar—neither shall I ever forget it, Lina," he said, correcting himself, and drawing the sculls dexterously into the rowlocks again. "That night and its peril went a long way towards making us the—the good friends that we are, Lina."

She dried her hand in her handkerchief, and gathered up the scarlet cords.

"We are more than mere friends, Mark," she said gently, without looking at him. "You know that; you know it well."

They had passed through the farther gate; half-a-dozen strokes from Hencastle's muscular arms, and they had shot past the Hubbles' fine house and gardens—past the swift gliding dam of the tumbling weir—away from the picturesque and straggling old bridge, now growing dim of outline in the gathering twilight—and out on to the wide calm bosom of the Moss-court portion of the stream.

"Yes, I pray Heaven that we are more than friends," he answered, with unconscious sternness; "but Lina—when we are to be to each other something more than 'mere than friends'!"

She clasped her small lily hands in her lap, with the scarlet rudder cords trailing over her white wrists.

"Mark," she pleaded, hardly above a whisper, "trust me! Oh, trust me a little while longer!—and then—and then by-and-by, I do not know why it should not be as you desire. Unless—unless, Mark, it be that, when you know all, you should desire it no longer—"

She stopped. He rested upon his oars.

The wild sweet "jug-a-jug" of the nightingale, full of joyous passion and exquisite, delicious pain, smote the tranquil evening silence, with the musical rippling of the current around the keel of the boat.

"Nothing, Lina, could ever make any difference," he said.

"Ah, wait and see!" she answered. And bowed her face in her hands.

"Well, I have been very good, very patient—have I not, dear?—so far," he said, bending towards her; a smile half jesting, half sad and tender, flitting over his brown face.

"Indeed, indeed yes," she replied earnestly, looking up at him—"too good, too patient; far more so than I deserve! And yet—and yet, if I try your goodness and your patience still farther, I know that you will bear with me as you have borne with me until now? Oh, Mark, say that you will!"

"I will try, my darling," Hencastle said, in his simple, straightforward way. And this time he neither checked himself nor did Lina rebuke him either.

The woods, on one side of them, cast their great solemn shadow over the river. Over the low-lying meadows of Moss-court, on the other side, the river mist was slowly spreading like a silver-gray cloud. Saffron buttercups and sturdy ox-eyed daisies were at this hour blurred and indistinct. They had folded close their dewy petals, had dropped their heads, and were awaiting thus the sun's up-rising once more and the carolling again at dawn of the soaring lark.

Presently Lina started in her seat. They were nearing the gloomy parkland of Moss-court Priory.

The figure of a man in evening clothes, with a light coat over them, was visible in the dusk there upon the towing-path. He came onward: a lighted cigar between his lips; his face set towards Marley Mills. Lina recognised him at once.

She pulled sharply the cord in her right hand, and the boat veered suddenly to the Moss-court bank.

"There is Sir Philip Wroughton," she said, as calmly as she could. "Let me land a moment, Mark—will you? I must speak to him."

Hencastle turned his head quickly and looked towards the meadow. The lines in his forehead deepened as he looked.

"Lina," said he slowly, "you heard from Sir Philip only this morning; you hear from him often; the letter I mean was on your plate at breakfast-time—I could not help recognising his crest and handwriting when I took the letter from the bag. You cannot want to speak to him now—"

"I do—I must," she interrupted, still tugging at the right-hand cord. "It is concerning the contents of that letter—of other letters too—that I now wish to speak to him. Mark, bear with me—be patient with me—you said you would! I must speak for a moment with Sir Philip Wroughton—and—and, Mark, I would rather that you were near me whilst I do so. If you will not humour me in this, I shall be compelled to go alone again to Moss-court Priory—and—and, dear, I am afraid of him sometimes. I hardly

know why. The bank is low yonder—let me land!"

"Do as you will, then, Lina; you know your own affairs best."

"Trust me—trust me!" she pleaded once more in low and hurried tones of distress. "Do not hinder me, Mark, or he will be gone."

The next moment the keel of the boat was grating along the gravelly shallows of the bank.

"I will wait for you here," Hencastle said more kindly—"here by these rushes and this clump of sedge. Do not hurry."

She murmured "Thank you" as she sprang ashore before he could stop out himself to assist her; and hastened, her white gown brushing the dewy grass, after the retreating figure of the master of the Priory.

Her step was light; he did not hear it; knew not indeed that he was tracked by Lina, until she touched his arm and said rapidly:

"Sir Philip, I want to know how much longer you intend to keep me vainly waiting—what you mean to do? Your letters in reality are mere subterfuges, are worth nothing, are not to be relied upon. I am weary of this miserable putting-off," she said, passionately—"from week to week, from day to day. Sir Philip, I am resolved to act at once; I will remain no longer passive. If you will not proclaim the truth, I shall. Afterwards do as you please! This new marriage that you contemplate—and I have sworn it to you before—shall not go forward until justice in full has been done—"

"You! Let it you again! Curse you!"

He had turned upon her savagely, started at first out of all speech by this unlooked-for attack. He had not dreamed that Lina was near him. And for an instant or two the expression of hate and fury which lit up his white face and sombre eyes was such in its intensity that the girl recoiled involuntarily from his side—though regarding him steadily meanwhile.

Once before in her life had she seen upon his features that self-same dangerous expression—on that memorable first night in the library at Moss-court Priory.

He had flung away his cigar, scarcely knowing what he did in his wrath, and his wax-like hands twitched nervously as if their working were beyond his control. He glanced restlessly from Lina to the river—there was a well-known hole in its weedy bed, mysteriously and horribly deep, near to the spot where they then stood—and from the river back to Lina.

"Do not venture to hurt me," said she, breathlessly. "I have a friend close by. In an instant a cry from me would bring him here to my side. Have a care, Sir Philip, what you do!"

A swift change passed over him. The look of smothered, impotent hate gave place to one of languid contempt.

"You alarm yourself unnecessarily," he said. "Why should I wish to harm you? I tell you, you have placed me in a most difficult position by your persistent and extraordinary statements, though no man in his senses would believe you; and I want time—time to consider—time to arrange and settle many things—"

"Your tale—your excuses for delay are always the same," she stopped him contemptuously. "You do not believe me—but you want time! My theme likewise is always the same—I want justice for my brother and for myself—justice more especially for the memory of our dead mother!"

"You are a woman; and, like all women, are impatient of small delays," he said, indifferently. "Why should there be delay? There is no possible reason or excuse for it, except that of your own cowardice. You are afraid, after all these years, to let the world hear the truth," was Lina's passionate retort.

Wroughton shrugged his shoulders.

"That of course is the point," said he, coolly. "Is it a case of truth or not? The fact is, I require time to demonstrate that you, Miss Ferris, are the mainspring of a vile conspiracy. Let me once prove that it is so, and it will go hard with you and with those who are backing you up in the shameless business."

"You are perfectly aware, Sir Philip," she replied, with an effort speaking as coolly and

disdainfully as he, "that you want time for no such course. Your own conscience—if nothing else—convinces you that I am speaking the truth; that I have told you nothing but the truth throughout."

"If you have spoken the truth, why, then, your mother lied infamously," he said, sullenly.

"If she lied—and I freely admit that she did—she lied to punish you," returned Lina, her anger flashing out again in spite of her.

"I could show you that when Vangie Brooke died, she died childless—died, too, some years prior to the date on which you affirm the event happened," Wroughton said. "I have still in my possession letters from my solicitors that will prove the fact."

"She was not Vangie Brooke when she died," cried Lina, haughtily. "How dare you, in my presence, call her Vangie-Brooke!"

"Oh, very well," rejoined Sir Philip—"as you will."

"Have not I here a copy of her marriage certificate?" demanded the girl, her beautiful proud eyes sparkling as she clutched as it were defiantly the bosom of her gown, wherein the black locket with its treasure lay hid.

"A forged certificate is no very great curiosity," answered Wroughton, with another shrug. "Desperate men stick at naught," he added, with his rare and saturnine smile.

Lina's lips curled.

"I have told you the truth; my story is true," she reiterated coldly. "It only remains for you, Sir Philip, to investigate any part of it whatsoever that you may feel in the least inclined to cast a doubt upon. But remember, please, that I am sick of this idle putting-off; sick of this eternal temporising and going over the old ground. I am fully resolved now to take my own course—you may take yours. I have remained long enough in the neighbourhood of Moss-court Priory. I have warned you; I have pleaded with you. Your son, Sir Philip, and heir, needs me by his couch at home. Be astonished at nothing that may happen—that I may do—after to-night."

He grasped her suddenly by the wrist.

"Curse you!" he once more burst forth. "Listen to me!"

His grip upon her delicate flesh hurt her.

"Let me go!" she panted. "Recollect that I am not alone."

She tried to wrench her wrist free; but she found that it was impossible.

"Truly your conduct, Sir Philip," she said mockingly then, "is that of one who has no ground for fear; who believes himself to be the victim of a conspiracy! Somehow the conviction seizes me to-night that all this while, these weeks gone past, you have been occupied in searching out—as far as it now lies within the power of any living man to search it out—the truth of the history of my dear mother's life and death; the history of her melancholy life after your cruel desertion—secretly believing every word of it as it was told to you by me on that night when I came to you in the library at Moss-court Priory. Yes! I can read in your coward eyes that it is so—that you have been hunting out the truth for yourself. Ah! Sir Philip Wroughton, I do not fear you now. The game is nearly over. Bad as your own small world knows you to be, the whole world shall soon know you for what you really are!"

The grip about her wrist was insensibly tightened.

"Listen one moment," he said, almost hissing out his words, and bending so near to her that his breath swept her cheek. "Listen, Lina—Vangie—Evangeline—or whatever name it be by which you are rightly called—I own that you have right on your side; that I am in your power. You spoke, when you came to the Priory, of a person, a widow, living at 17, Thistle-street, Fulham, with whom you and your mother and brother lodged in years gone by. I have found her out, have been to her—she still lives, starved and needy in her old age, plying her old trade, at the same address. She was in the secret, as you told me, and assisted your mother in the fraud she planned and carried out. I bribed her heavily—as heavily as I could afford—with the

result that she confessed everything. She showed me too that lying grave in the Brompton cemetery. Moreover, in other quarters I have proved that your story is true. Evangeline—Lina—I ask you for another month—another month's secrecy—no more. On my sacred word, no more! I ask you for time to think—to turn round, as it were—that is all! I am hedged about with the most pressing worry and difficulty, worry and difficulty of all kinds. At the expiration of that time, a month hence, I solemnly swear to you that it shall be as you desire. You and your brother shall have justice then—justice in the eyes of all the world! Surely that is enough—that will satisfy you?"

CHAPTER XXIV.

SWORN FOES.

It had grown so dark that Mark, in his boat by the sedge-clump under the bank, could by this time see but very indistinctly the figures of Lina Ferris and Sir Philip Wroughton standing there together upon the towing-path.

The mist enfolded them; the amethyst tint of the gloaming had deepened imperceptibly into the monochromatic gloom of night. Stars throbbed faintly in the calm sky; their reflections quivered far down in the cold ebony mirror beneath them. A little wind crept out of the willows and played daintily and chillily athwart the broad and gliding river. The rushes stirred and whispered in ghostly fashion; the whisper travelled slowly through the meadowgrass. The young May moon was coyly showing herself behind the black plantations of Moss-court Priory.

The breeze brought Lina's voice to Mark. He could tell that the converse of those two dim figures was impassioned and stormy. What on earth, he wondered moodily, as he had wondered so often of late, could be the business between them? Ah, would the day ever really dawn, would the sun ever really shine upon that day, when there should be no hidden thing of any kind between himself and Lina?

He grew uneasy, restless; he fidgeted with the sculls; he splashed the water idly with one of them in the hope that Lina would hear the sound and understand his impatience.

Presently another figure—that of a gaunt old man, whose head was bare and whose lank gray hair hung wildly in the wind about his stooped shoulders—passed along the towing-path. He was accustomed at times to go bareheaded, and thus to face all weathers in his rough duties at the Lock.

He had with him an old boat-hook, which he habitually used as a walking-stick; in the other hand he carried a mass of wet twine, with some of which—securely to tough withy pegs—he had been fastening down his lines in the pike-haunted and lily-covered pools of the Moss-court backwater.

In those shadowy pools by the Priory's deserted grounds, where the water lay deep and silent, sheltered by a wilderness of copse and plantation—deep, hushed water, across which the moonbeams flew screeching fearlessly, trailing behind them over the broad smooth lily-leaves their slim red legs and delicate webbed-feet—big fish lived and thrived, and were occasionally taken therefrom at prodigious weight and size.

No voice nor car throughout the livelong day disturbed their somnolent quiet, unless Guy Arminger, unchaining Sir Philip's old punt, went voyaging by himself through those long lush lily-streams to reach the public stream Marley way.

Hearncastle recognized the wild-looking old man, tramping bare-headed along the meadow, with his boat-hook for a staff, and muttering to himself as was his wont.

"Good-night, Jasper," said Mark. "Any sport?"

Perhaps the lock-keeper did not hear; at any rate, he returned no answer. He tramped on, muttering aloud and shaking his gray head; and, in the darkness, came blundering against Lina and Sir Philip Wroughton.

Sir Philip had released the girl's wrist. They were about to part.

"So let it be—another month then," she was

saying, wearily. "Heaven alone knows whether or not you are to be trusted!"

"In this you may trust me. I have given you my word," he replied. "Doubt me, of course, if you will."

"The revelation will astonish your future wife and her kindred," said Lina, bitterly.

"That remains to be seen."

"I presume that you are now on your way to Marley Mills?" the girl said.

Wroughton inclined his head.

"On duty, you know," he answered, vaguely cynical. "And now good night, Lina, if I may call you so. Your mother, by the way, was always called Vangie, I remember. Well, I am glad that we are parting with an amicable understanding."

"Pardon me," she interrupted; "I should prefer your calling me simply by my right and lawful name—Miss Ferris."

"So!" laughed Wroughton, softly. "A singular arrangement, that, between you and me."

"To me and mine you are merely Sir Philip Wroughton," said the girl, icily and proudly; "and to the end of our lives you will never be more than that. Anything else would be utterly impossible. Wherever we may be, wherever, through accident or mischance, we may meet in this life, to us you will be only Sir Philip Wroughton."

"I assure you I have not the least objection," he told her, carelessly. "It will be pleasanter so, I have no doubt."

"Have not I told you over and over again that we want nothing of you—nothing—nothing—nothing—save justice," Lina said, her voice beginning to quiver again; "and justice—if there be justice out of Heaven—will we have. We want nothing else; we will accept nothing else at your hands."

"That is fortunate," Wroughton said, not perhaps without a gleam of sinister humour lurking in his deep-set eyes. "Good-night, Miss Ferris."

"Good-night, Sir Philip."

Ere she could move a step to leave him, the weird old lock-keeper, with his twine and boat-hook, had stumbled in the gloom against them.

Wroughton pushed the old man roughly aside, and he nearly fell.

"How could you! how dared you!" cried Lina indignantly, stretching out her hand to Jasper. "He could not help it—he did not see us."

Jasper knew instantly the voice of Lina.

"My Vangie—Evangeline!" he exclaimed, joyfully, "is it you? God bless you for your goodness and your pretty face," he rambled on, in his childish, crazy fashion—"that pretty face—those beautiful eyes—so like my dear lost girl's. My fair, sweet Vangie—"

"You babbling old fool—you are drunk!" broke out the master of the Priory, violently. "Get along home with you, and smother your senseless chatter in the mill-dam!"

He clutched Lina by the shoulder; but this time she jerked herself at once from his touch.

"What does he mean? What does he know?"

Wroughton whispered hoarsely in her ear. "You have told him nothing?"

"Nothing—he knows nothing as yet," replied the girl, briefly. "Well, perhaps, for you, Sir Philip, that he does not."

"No offence, sir, no offence," said Jasper.

"Why, Sir Philip, is it you? I'm sure I beg pardon, sir; I did not know it was you." The old man touched a wintry forelock. "This lady, sir, is so kind and beautiful—she is like my lost darling," he said, dreamily. "It was a happy day for me, Sir Philip, that brought her to these parts. She lets me call her Vangie sometimes. Sir, you remember my beautiful daughter—my Evangeline—the pride and darling of my—"

"This lady is Miss Ferris, Jasper," said Wroughton, in his usual deliberate voice and manner, "who a little while ago was living at Marley Mills. You are a raving old lunatic, you know, an unmitigated nuisance, my friend, and you ought to be shut up like other lunatics—and so kept out of harm's way."

"Ah me, ah me!" groaned the aged lock-keeper, "shut up, did you say, sir! Yes, perhaps the day will come when I shall be shut up and shall swing for it; for if I live to find him, I mean to kill him, sir. That is only right and

fair—an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, and a life for a life! He robbed me of my child, ruined her, killed her, and the Almighty—ay! something tells me that it will be so—one day will bring us face to face!"

"Jasper, grandpa—my dear old friend," murmured Lina, piteously, taking within both her own the lock-keeper's horny hand, "you must not talk in that dreadful way. Vengeance is His—not man's. He will repay. Leave the sinner to His mercy; it is infinitely more just than man's."

"No, no!" cried Jasper, smiting with his boat-hook the dewy earth, and lifting skyward his worn face and wild gray locks, so that the broadening moonlight shone fully down upon them. "Murder is man's own affair, to do with the murderer as he sees fit, God will have nothing to do with murderers—and he took away and murdered my darling. I dreamed the other night," said Jasper Brooke, more gently, "that I had found him; found him after all these long years of waiting and watching and vain praying for his coming. We met, he and I, in the meadows here; and the moon was shining, as it shines now; and I split his skull open with my hook—with a swift and sudden blow I did it—and I danced and laughed round the corpse as the blood gushed out, and stamped on his white staring face, and ground my heel into his teeth and crushed them down his lying throat, and thanked Heaven—"

Lina, in an agony of horror and fear, tried to speak, gasped, then said, with hands clasped convulsively together:—

"Hush, Jasper, for pity's sake! Do not—you frighten me! I cannot listen to you if you talk so wickedly. Go home—please go home; it is late, and there may be no one at the Lock. There—there are boats waiting to go through—I can hear the shouting. Can you not hear it too?"

"Hist, my Vangie!—my beautiful Evangeline!" whispered Jasper, "I would not harm you; you have nothing to fear; only him, when he is found—"

The situation had become too much for Sir Philip. With a gesture of vehement impatience he flung out his arm, pushing Jasper backward, and turned abruptly from him and Lina.

"D—the old madman!" he cried fiercely; and strode off in the direction of the Hubbles' abode.

For a few minutes after Sir Philip's departure the girl talked kindly and soothingly with Jasper Brooke, pressed his rough old hand repeatedly within hers and held it lovingly against her throat. Then she gave him what money she happened to have with her, and again bade him hasten home to his post at the Lock. He sobbed out his gratitude, blessed her for her bounty, and did her bidding with the docility of a child.

Having seen the old man start upon his homeward trudge, Lina, slowly and wearily, went back to the spot where Mark, leaning forward as he sat, his arms folded, his face bowed on his chest, still waited for her in the boat by the bank.

He had not moved. The skiff was exactly where she had left it—motionless by the sedge-clump.

"Mark, are you asleep?" she said.

At the sound of her voice he sprang up directly, and stretched out his hands to help her in.

"No. I was in a brown study, Lina; not asleep. You have been a long time."

"Yes—I wonder you did not grow tired of waiting for me, and row home alone," she said, with a poor attempt at playfulness.

"That was so likely, was it not, dear?"

He could see that she was shivering, though the river air, as yet, had not become really cold; it was misty and chilly at present, but no more. The ice-cold breath of the river would creep up and spread out with the "winnowing wind" at dawn.

So before pushing off, Mark wrapped his coat round Lina—sculling, he did not want it himself. As he tried, in his awkward, tender fashion, to button it over her tippet at her throat, he felt her tears dropping upon his hand.

"My dearest, what is the matter!" he said huskily; his blood burning, his strong hand

trembling. "Lina—ah, Lina! if you could only bring yourself to trust me absolutely—"

"Do not mind me, Mark," she faltered; "I shall be better presently. Let me be for a little while—please, do not mind me. I am cold, tired, unutterably depressed; that is all, believe me."

He crushed back his love; for the world he would not worry or offend her; and silently settled to his work. Two or three measured strokes, and the skiff was well out on the moonlit river.

"The stream is with us—we shall soon be home, Lina," said he cheerfully, but not looking at her now. "We cannot go on to Highcross or anywhere else to-night. 'Tis too late, you know."

"No, not to-night," she answered mechanically, brushing away her tears.

The black lone woods frowned above them; the moonlight, in a rippling golden path, lay shimmering upon the Wane's dark bosom. The measured dip of the sculls sounded curiously cold and unearthly as they neared the smooth swift water which fed the roaring weir. In a clanging, melancholy manner, upon the night stillness, smote the chimes of a clock at Moescourt Priory.

It was a quarter to ten.

"Helen will think we are drowned," observed Hencastle lightly.

"Is it very deep here?" asked Lina, with an absent little smile.

"Awfully deep."

The girl shuddered.

"Lock—lock—lock!" shouted Mark, with lungs stentorian.

"Lock—a—lock—a—lock—a!" mocked Echo, over wood, wold, and water.

It was Davy Crockett who, in response to the cry, again wound back the huge wet gate.

"Have you seen anything up yonder of that dodderly old buffer, Master Mark?" said the foreman testily. "I be pretty nigh tired o' this job, and wants to get home to bed."

"Yes, we have seen him. He will soon be here—if you mean Jasper Brooke," put in Lina gently.

"It's about time, miss," grunted Davy. "Martha ha' been over here for me, worriting about—thought I was lost or drowned or summat."

"Oh, it's all right, Davy," said Hencastle. "You'll soon be home now. Good-night."

"Good-night, Master Mark."

A few minutes later Mark and Lina stood again before the Hencastles' garden-gate; the skiff chained up in its place in the boat-house, and Mark—Lina having unbuttoned it from her neck—putting on his coat before going indoors.

A light shone ruddily through the blinds of the mock-scented old drawing-room. Helen was playing there; and a clear light tenor accompanied the notes of the piano. It was the voice of Guy Arminger.

He had come up to the Lower Mills, everlasting pipe in mouth, intending, if he could, to persuade Mark to stroll with him as far as Marley, for a game at billiards at the convivial "Bear." But Mark, he found, was out with Miss Ferris; and Helen at home alone.

"Stay, Guy, with me," she said very earnestly. "I do not often ask a favour of you, do I? You used not to want so much persuasion to spend a quiet evening at the Lower Mills."

And Guy, stirred by an access of tenderness and contrition, took the dear face within his two hands, smiled down on it lingeringly—his beautiful eyes half merry, half sorrowful—kissed it, and stayed.

Lina and Mark paused a moment to listen outside before going in. Arminger was singing the song called "Love and Life," which he had himself given to Helen one evening before Christmas of the past winter.

"Though I may breathe no word, dear love,
Yet do I love thee more dearly than life;
Through storm and calm, through shadow and shine,
Through life's unrest and through life's long strife,
I am thine, dear love, I am thine!
Dear one! trust me in Love,
Dear heart! trust me in Life!"

Touched by the yearning strain of the music, Hencastle put his arm around Lina and drew her

unresisting to his heart. She, with a sigh, pressed her head against his breast and closed her eyes. He bent his face over her until it rested on the sweet tired white one which lay against his faithful heart.

"Mark," she murmured, "you will let me stay with you another month!"

"Another month, Lina!" he echoed. "You know how impossible life without you will be to me."

"In another month," she said, dreamily, "it will be all clear—all clear, and just, and right. That is, if—if—"

"If what, Lina?"

He held her more closely. He was vowing to himself that nothing in time or in eternity should ever part them from each other.

"If Sir Philip Wroughton does not play me false," she answered. "He gave me a solemn promise to-night, Mark, but—but—somehow my heart misgives me. I am afraid. I am full of fears. I cannot trust him. The Wroughtons were ever false, never truthful," she said, bitterly. "In spite of his promise, I feel that he means mischief."

"Lina," said the young man, passionately, "I do not understand. You know that I do not understand. But I swear, nevertheless, that no living soul shall harm you, my dear one, so long as I am near to shield you!"

She opened her eyes and smiled on him, faintly, but trustfully. Her arms crept slowly upward and entwined themselves shyly about his neck.

"I fear no man—nothing on earth," she said, "when you are with me, Mark."

CHAPTER XXV.

WAITING.

It was early on the following day when they learned that a sot in his cups—more brute or devil than man—had, in his drunken fury, kicked and battered out the life of a woman; in this case, an old and a defenceless creature, whose feeble steps already were tottering towards the grave.

Nicky Burden at last had done what Eden Alley and the hapless old soul herself had all along predicted that he would do—he had killed his grandmother; had done her to death with brutal kicks and with blows which had scattered the old woman's brains.

He had come home, mad-drunk, to his hovel in the Alley, and had finished his day's work with bloody hands.

Of course the police were after him; and the days went by; but no Nicky Burden could be found anywhere. A pitiful reward of a few pounds was offered to anyone that should give information that would lead to the apprehending of the murderer; but neither murderer nor informer was forthcoming. Nicky, in his way, was a clever criminal.

Only a few pitiful pounds. And was it not enough? Granny Burden was merely a poor lean old pauper, of no consequence, of no use to anybody in the world; and so handbills were printed—"£20 reward. Whereas," etc. etc.—and were stuck on five-barred gate-posts and upon tumbledown barn doors, and upon tree-trunks in lonely country lanes along which nobody was ever seen to go; and there the matter ended.

And it soon came to pass that, on one sunny afternoon, they bore her corpse from Eden Alley, and briskly "rattled her bones over the stones," and laid her in the narrow hole which had been dug to receive her body. Poor old Granny Burden! She was far happier out of the world than in it. In her cheap pauper's coffin, and in her lowly pauper's grave, she sleeps as well as though that coffin were of oak and of silver, and a marble slab with sculptured urn marked the spot where the green earth alone covers her.

Just as the old woman had left it, so her hovel remained. No one in the Alley now could be induced to enter the place. Blood stains were still upon door and wall; blood clots were still visible upon the foul brick floor. A heap of dead ashes strewn the black hearth; and the faggot which she had gathered on the day of her death yet lay in one corner of the dismal abode.

The more imaginative of the Alley's inhabitants swore that at night Granny Burden's ghost was to be seen wringing its hands at the upper window; and accordingly the house was shunned by everybody more completely than if pestilence had reigned there within it.

What had become of Nicky? Nobody knew; nobody cared. Some said he was hidden in a London slum; others opined that he had got off to America—perhaps to Australia. Wherever he was, said his particular friends, he was safe, "before he had done, to end on the gallows." For the present he had cheated the hangman of a job; nevertheless, sooner or later, he would find the rope round his neck.

In a week's time the murder was forgotten, and Marley began to talk of other things; for the popular Race-week was drawing near. In these heavenly "blue-unclouded" days Lina Ferris grew terribly restless, and any settled occupation requiring mental concentration seemed unspeakably irksome to her. She wandered in the morning about the meadows of Moescourt; she sketched in a desultory fashion by the riverside. Of an afternoon she would sit and talk with old Jasper Brooke, and watch the pleasure boats pass through the lock; some going down stream to Marley-on-the-Wane, others up the river Moescourt way.

Her eyes carried in them daily an expression of feverish expectancy. She looked sometimes as one who is listening for a footstep—waiting for a knock—or watching for a letter that must come ere long. The month of further grace which she had conceded to Sir Philip Wroughton was now drawing to a close.

What would he do? How would he keep his promise? What would the expiration of that month bring to Lina?

With intense anxiety she saw the given days go by; and prayed for, and yet feared, the dawn of the last of them which should let in light upon the long-buried truth.

There was so much at stake; so much to be hoped; so much perhaps to be feared! What—and this was the question which now was never absent from her brain—what would Sir Philip do in order to enlighten the world; in what manner, Lina wondered, would he set about revealing the truth?

She could only wait.

She had not once seen him since the night when, in the twilight meadows of Moescourt, they had talked together by the river's edge; that night on which he had, so to speak, shown her and thrown up his cards, and acknowledged her mistress of the game and the situation. She had heard, however, that Sir Philip was constantly at Marley Mills in the character of Sophy Hubble's accepted lover, and knew that the rumour must be true. And people still said that the marriage would shortly take place; for Reuben Hubble himself said so, told everybody he met, in fact, the same thing. His youngest daughter Sophy was soon to be made Lady Wroughton.

And Lina could only wait. But the fever in her veins was telling upon her health. She looked very wan and troubled sometimes.

Her only hours of peace and mental ease were those when Mark was by her side. That strange, cold, heavy sense of coming calamity was lifted then from her heart; and, forgetting that she feared the future, her soul was tranquilized with the consciousness of Hencastle's strength and love.

Nor was Helen Hencastle herself happy in heart and mind in these "long blue sunny summer days." Far, far from it! She, like Lina, had learned to dread the future; though it was not for herself that she trembled. Ah, no—not for herself!

Characteristically, however, she was silent in her trouble, sharing it with no one. As for Mark, he too was equally reticent; and in these days of anxiety and apprehension, the name of Guy Arminger hardly ever passed his lips. What he knew of Arminger's backsliding he kept, after his own reserved fashion, to himself. What good could be done by idle chattering? He had reasoned with, he had pleaded with, nay, on one occasion losing all patience with the culprit,

he had sworn outright at Guy for his folly in going his own blind way. But his breath had been wasted; no good result achieved; and Hernecastle had lost both heart and temper in striving to save Arringer from that worst enemy of his—himself.

If he was bent upon rushing headlong to his own destruction—why, he must go. Mark had done a staunch friend's utmost to hold him back from the abyss. He loved the young fellow as well as it is possible for one man to love another, and he grieved bitterly over a downfall which seemed inevitable.

But Hernecastle, like his sister, grieved in secret; yet, although Guy's name was seldom uttered by either, each knew, each felt, that the scapegrace was continually in the thoughts of the other. Well, Mark had done his best for him. He could do no more.

Such reticence, however, with regard to the doings of the happy-go-lucky Guy, prevailed not in the kitchen at the Lower Mills. Said Davy Crockett thoughtfully, one evening at tea-time, to his mate Martha:

"That young man, Martha, accordin' to all 'counts, is going on wuss and wuss."

"What young man, Davy?" said Martha.

"Why him at the Priory, to be sure," answered Davy, shaking his old head slowly, as he left off stirring his tea to gaze into the kitchen-grate, which was polished and shone most beautifully, being filled with fresh green boughs. The only fire in the house, now that summer was come, was kept burning in the outer kitchen; and the scullery door being set wide open, the twittering of many birds came drowsily in, with a flood of warm light from the westering sun and the rustling of the willows in the lane.

"Ah, him at the Priory," echoed Martha, gloomily. "No, Davy, his goings-on, I know, certainly ain't what they should be. Jest the reverse, I'm afraid."

"And he is such an 'andsome young man," sighed Jane.

"Hold your silly tongue, gal, do!" cried Martha, sharply. "Haven't I told you often enough that you are too young by half to get thinking o' young men? I'm sure I don't know what gals are made of now-a-days, everlasting a-dreaming o' young men."

Jane was reflecting that Martha must have dreamed of Davy once; but not daring to give utterance to this reasonable supposition, she sighed again and held her peace.

"Only t'other night," continued Davy, "I met him staggering along home, outside in the lane here, drunk as a lord. If Sir Philip was like anybody else, he'd ha' sent the young chap about his business long ago."

"Perhaps he don't know," said Martha. "And even if he did know, I expect he wouldn't care. Sir Philip cares only for himself."

"'Tis all them plaguy pubs," Davy remarked virtuously, "as does the mischief. He—that young Mr. Arringer, I mean—is up at the 'Bear' every blessed night of his life, a-betting and a-drinking and a-talking o' the races—"

"Drink's at the bottom of all the wickedness in creation, Davy," threw in Martha, grimly. "As you say yourself, 'tis your pubs as does the mischief. Look at that wretch of a Nicky Burden."

"Ah, it is so—'tis so. You're right there, my lass," agreed Davy, meekly. "You never said a truer word in your life."

"Then, Davy," said his gaunt old lass, fixing her hard eyes upon him as she spoke, "I wonder that I do, how you can be so fond yourself o' turning in at the 'Hopleaf'—a nasty, low, evil place, I call it—whenever you goes up with the waggin into Marley."

"Now and agen, Martha, only now and agen, you know," murmured Davy, with an apologetic air, rising somewhat unexpectedly and peering about the kitchen for his old white cap. "By-the-bye, Martha, haven't it struck you lately that that young lady from Squire Hubble's side of the water have been here on our side a tidy while now? I should think that there 'ud pretty soon be a wedding in the family, on this side as well as on t' other."

"May be you're right, Davy. I don't say you

ain't," answered Martha, steadily; "but I was talking o' the 'Hopleaf'."

"A wedding!" echoed Jane, her full-moon face and flat honest features all a-glow at the bare suggestion; "well, I never; if I haven't often said to myself that it 'ud come to that! I hopes they'll be happy with all my—"

Martha turned with her customary severity upon the simple yet offending Jane, and once more silenced that strapping maiden with her stern old eyes.

"As I was saying, Davy," she then continued, "it's when you goes into Marley, I mean, with the waggin—"

But Davy, having found his white cap, was gone; had vanished through the scullery doorway. The Lower Mills, however, were not working on this calm summer evening; and Davy had taken himself off to the Lock, to lend, as he often did when not in the mill, a helping hand to Jasper Brooke.

(To be continued.)

MARSH FAIRY.

—O:—

CHAPTER XXVI.

It never occurred to Olive that she was to be detained against her will in the little house that faced her. It was a curiously constructed cottage, with a verandah about it, from which the rotten posts that supported it were falling away. There were two stories to it, the upper one forming a sort of gable roof, and in front of the windows were iron bars, which was one reason, perhaps, of the peculiar appearance of the place.

Olive glanced up at it without being conscious of what she saw. She did not pause to analyze the motive that made Jack demand her entrance there, but as she by no means wished to continue the conversation in presence of that obsequious coachman who stood directly besides Jack, she got out and followed the boy into the house.

There was no hall to the place, but they entered at once into the "parlour," if that room could lay claim to the old-fashioned name of the reception-room.

It was large enough, but that was about the only recommendation to which it could lay claim, for it certainly was not clean, and it was not well furnished. Still, there was nothing distinctly repulsive in it, but there certainly was in the face of the old woman who stood in the centre of it, its only occupant.

She wore a red handkerchief tied about her head, after the manner of the slaves of former times, but from it escaped a few straggling grey hairs that gave her the appearance of a witch. Her gown was a dingy calico, partially open at the throat, through which could be seen a neck so scraggy that every ligament seemed to stand out like a whip-cord. She was old enough and ugly enough, and her countenance was bad enough, but even that did not give to her the repulsive look that caused Olive to glance away from her with the little shiver of disgust. It was the short-stemmed, black cob-pipe that adorned the corner of her mouth. It was so old and so strong that the odour from it seemed to permeate every crevice in the apartment, and yet she drew upon it as if it contained the elixir of life.

But Jack was too much excited to pay any heed to what he saw. She motioned him upstairs without speaking, and he hobbled in the direction she indicated, almost crawling up in his determination to get there; and Olive, half-dazed, followed without question.

The door of the room stood open, and into it they went, Olive closing it behind them with her own hand. It shut with an ominous click, but she did not observe it.

There were two rooms on that floor—small, meagrely furnished, peculiar-looking rooms; but Olive did not even look about her. With quiet force she pushed Jack into a chair and stood there before him.

"I want you to tell me what this farce means?" she demanded, coldly, almost angrily. "Surely

it has gone far enough. Why have you forced me into this house, and what is the meaning of your mad conversation?"

Jack looked up at her. There was a mad flush upon his cheeks that excitement had lent them, and there was a sparkle in his eye that Olive had never seen there before. When he spoke his voice was so hoarse that it sounded as if he were suffering from the effects of a severe cold.

"It is not madness," he cried. "Heaven knows I wish it were! By my own passionate haste I put both you and my father into the positions in which you now are, and it is my duty to retrieve my error in so far as lies within my power. Olive, the man whom you trust is the blackest-hearted scoundrel that ever disgraced the name of man!"

"Of whom are you speaking?"

"Of Noel Chatteris."

"It is false! No blacker lie ever left the lips of mortal man than that you have just uttered. I don't know where you got the cruel information that you have believed, but there never lived a purer, more loyal, honest, generous man than Noel Chatteris. I would stake my soul upon it!"

"Can you deny that he is engaged to marry Mabel Naylor?" asked Jack, hotly.

"I have not denied it."

"You know it, then?"

"Certainly I do."

"And can you deny that he has told you that he loved you? Can you deny that you have listened and have told him that his love was returned?"

Olive hesitated for a moment. She was looking down upon him with almost cruel scorn, but it slowly faded, and an expression of tender reminiscence crossed her face. Her voice was so low as to be almost inaudible when she answered him.

"Why should I deny it? There was nothing in our conversation to which an angel might not have listened."

Jack groaned and for a moment covered his face with his hands. When he removed them his countenance was stern and set like that of a determined man.

"I am going to do you the justice to say, Olive, that I believe you are sincere in what you have said. It but goes to show how innocent and pure you are yourself. But you must listen to what I have to say, and believe it. Noel Chatteris is one of the greatest scoundrels that ever walked the earth! He is plotting your ruin as surely as ever man conceived a murder, and doing it in the most dastardly way that lies open to man—doing it as he plays the friend. He does not intend to try to clear our father of the charge that has been brought against him, unless you pay him the price of your honour for so doing. Oh, Olive! are you so blind that you will not see? Noel Chatteris does not ask you to become his wife. He coolly tells you that he is betrothed to another. He makes you understand that marriage is impossible, and yet he has the audacity to tell you that he loves you. If I were not the helpless baby that I am, I should kill him for the insult that he has offered you. You may be the daughter of a suspected, even condemned murderer, your mother may have been accused of sin, you may have lived your life in the heart of a swamp, but you are still a lady—a pure girl—and the man should pity your misfortunes, rather than try to add to them in the vilest way that could suggest itself to mortal. While your father is not here, I am your protector, weak and helpless as I am, and I will save you in the only way that lies within my power. Olive, promise me—no, swear to me—that you will never see nor speak to Noel Chatteris again."

She had listened to him quietly, more surprised at each word that he had uttered. As he finished, she drew a chair to his side, and took his hand in hers with soothing kind of motion, as she might have done to one suffering from delirium.

"I don't know where you got all these foolish notions from," she said gently. "I don't know who can have put all this wild nonsense into your head, but you must believe me when I tell you, once for all, that it is not true. There never was a nobler, purer man under God's sun than the

one you have chosen to call a scoundrel. You don't know what you are talking about, and for that reason I forgive you. I should have thought the mistake you made concerning our father would have taught you a lesson, but it seems that it has not. I am not quite a fool, Jack, and it seems to me that I am quite as capable of taking care of myself as you are of dictating to me, particularly when you have no opportunity of knowing anything about what you are talking of. There was no insult to me in Noel Chatteris's words. He asked for nothing, desired nothing at my hands. His confession was the result of circumstances alone. I have seen him since, and he spoke to me with even greater formality than he had ever done before. Not one word passed his lips whereby one could have even imagined that he remembered our former conversation. And now there is one question I wish to ask you before I return to the people who have been my warmest friends—Who has put this cruel idea into your head? Who has come to you with this wicked lie?"

"I—I can not answer you. But it is true. It is—"

"Please say no more. Had your informant not been ashamed of the dastardly advantage that he was taking of your ignorance, he would not have refused to allow you to mention his name. He knew you to be a wild, impressionable boy. He knew that he would have no difficulty in making you believe this impossible thing, and he also knew that he could count upon your Quixotism to carry out a plan that none but the brain of a scoundrel could conceive. You have acted foolishly; you have acted like the boy that you are, without judgment or consideration. Now let this end, and in future think before you condemn the only friends you have. It is getting late. Let us go."

She did not wait to give him an opportunity to reply, but went to the door and turned the knob. It refused to yield.

She turned and looked at him in some surprise. "Have you locked the door?" she asked, coldly.

He rose slowly. He seemed to have grown old within those few moments. He seemed, also, to see with different eyes. He was the impressionable boy that she had said, impressionable, weak, perhaps; at any rate, he had already begun to regret the stand that he had taken—to doubt if he had been right.

"No," he answered, wearily; "I did not lock the door."

She tried it again, but, as it still refused to yield, she went to the rear door of the other room. That also was locked.

In some alarm she went to the front window and looked out through the bars.

The carriage that had been there was not to be seen. There was nothing but the marsh, the scrub-trees, the interwinding undergrowth within sight. It was all dingy, and dank, and miserable looking. Bits of old grey moss stretched itself along a few trees that had reached a higher growth than the others, spectral and ghoully in the shadows. Neither moan nor sound broke the stillness.

She turned with a little shiver and looked at him.

"What does it mean?" she asked, in a low tone. "Get us out of here, for Heaven's sake! I am afraid!"

He had sunk back helplessly into his chair. For some reason, he could not quite determine what, he, too, was frightened.

He stared at her for a moment. She looked to him like a ghost, standing there in the light that was growing grey with each minute. It sent a chill over him that was horrible in its effect.

He had grown white to the very lips, and rising suddenly, he hobbled to the door, and with all his little strength tried to force it open. It yielded no more than to the patter of an infant's hands.

Then he beat upon it with all his strength, calling aloud.

Suddenly, from the inner room, the old woman, with the cob-pipe in her mouth, made her appearance. He did not know how she got there. He did not hear the opening of any door, but feeling a presence he turned and looked.

She stood upon the threshold between the rooms. Olive saw her at the same moment, with a curious start of surprise.

"What's the matter?" she asked, in a dull, croaking sort of voice.

"We want to go," Jack stammered. "I expect the—the doors must have locked with a spring. I am sorry that we are forced to make such a noise. Is the carriage still here?"

A smile that was brutal passed over her face.

"I think you had better remain here," she replied, with a sort of half sneer. "You won't find no way to get back to town to-night, nor to-morrow, neither, fur that matter."

There was a momentary silence, then with wild, frightened eyes Olive stepped forward.

"Do you mean to say," she cried, hoarsely, "that we are prisoners?"

"Oh, no," answered the old crone, with a grin. "You are not no such bad thing as that. A friend of you're thought as how you would be happier out here with me fur awhile, and asked me to keep you. That is all."

"Who was the friend?"

"There is lots o' folks as don't like to have their generous deeds known, and this friend is one o' them. There ain't no use in gettin' worried. You'll git your supper and you'll git your breakfast and dinner every day while you stay here. That's more than you done when you lived in the swamps. Good-night."

She was gone in an instant. They did not hear the door close, and as soon as Olive realised that she was no longer there she darted after her, but the outer room was empty and the door still locked.

Olive rushed back to the room where Jack, half exhausted, had fallen across a chair.

"What does it mean?" she cried, not able to force her hoarse voice above a whisper. "What does it mean, and how does it happen that you have brought me to such a place?"

He tried to lift himself; he tried to smile, but the effort was so weak as to be almost imperceptible.

"Don't worry," he whispered; "it will be all right to-night or to-morrow morning. I told him that I would stay, and that I would keep you, but somehow it doesn't seem now as it did then."

"You told—whom that you would stay?"

"Mr. Lemaitre."

She drew back from him with a curious, fixed stare.

"And it was he who told you those wicked things?"

Jack nodded.

Olive fell back. Somehow there seemed greater horror to her in the situation than there had seemed before. She was silent for a long time, then she said, with a little wail that sounded heart-broken to Jack's startled ears.

"I am afraid that you have ruined us by your rash foolishness. Oh, Jack, you have known me all your life. Why could you not have trusted me in preference to a stranger? Heaven alone knows into what kind of a position you have thrown us both!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

NOEL CHATTERIS sat alone in his inner office, his head leaning upon his hand, his eyes directed through the window to the flower garden at the rear.

It was a pretty view, but it is doubtful if he saw any of it at all, for while the position suggested abstraction, his thoughts were very busy. Two days had elapsed since the disappearance of Olive and Jack.

Grace Thornton and Hugh Manning had given him the information of Olive's having left them through a note from Jack which summoned her, and the people at the house where he had succeeded in tracing Jack had told of their leaving there in a carriage, but there all trace of them was lost.

They were as completely lost as if the earth had swallowed them. From the moment that carriage left the door there was not the faintest trace of them to be found.

Noel Chatteris had devoted his entire time to it, but so far entirely without success, and as he sat there in his office pondering upon the situation, his sensations were anything but pleasant ones.

"They have not gone of their own will," he exclaimed. "The conversation with Hugh and Grace just before Olive left them proves that. And they have been taken away by some one who has plenty of money at his disposal, that is certain. But who? That is the question that puzzles me. The description of the man who called there to see Jack corresponds exactly with that of Maurice Lemaitre, but what object could he possibly have in desiring their disappearance? And they left the house alone and without compulsion of any kind, for those people declare that Olive was smiling as she assisted her brother into the carriage. They also state that there was no one else in it. What is one to think, and how is one to act?"

As if in answer to his mental question, the door opened, and his office boy brought him a note. He opened it and read it absently.

"I wish to see you at once. You have broken two appointments with me in as many days. Do you realize what this means to me? Answer by messenger when I may expect you."

MABEL."

He did not seem to realize its import until he came to the name, then he took up a sheet of paper wearily and wrote simply,—

"At once."

E.E."

He did not realize all its coldness. In fact, he thought nothing of it all, but despatched it at once, and, without so much as a glance at himself in the glass, he washed his hands and took up his hat.

It was growing late, and giving his office-boy instructions to close the office, as he would not return, that night he went out.

He did not take a carriage, but walked slowly in the direction of the home of his fiancée, his heart anything but light at the prospect of again seeing her. He had entirely forgotten the engagements to which she had referred, nor did he consider even then how he was to account for them. He went on with bent head, thinking of Olive, and how he was to endure that *été à été* that was forced upon him.

He rang the bell and walked abstractedly into the parlour when the servant had opened the door to admit him. Mabel was there before him. She came forward with both hands extended. Had he looked at her closely, he might have observed the expression of absolute desperation upon her countenance, but he was too much engrossed to think of that.

When a woman like Mabel Naylor gets desperate, there is no folly at which she pauses, and Noel Chatteris might have been prepared for anything, if he had but thought; but he did not. He kissed the brow that was lifted to him, but he did it unconsciously, and there was no one who could have realized that fact more fully than did Mabel Naylor.

It seemed to fill her with a rage that was undurable. She clashed her hands closely, and looked up at him with a smile that was diabolical.

"Where have you been," she asked, concealing her anger admirably, "and why have you avoided me? What has happened, Noel?"

"I have been very busy," he answered, in an abstracted sort of way, wearily pushing the hair from his forehead. "A strange thing has occurred in the case that is at present absorbing me. I don't like to take my business into the drawing-rooms of my friends, and, therefore, don't urge me to speak of it."

"Of your friends!" she exclaimed, her voice smouldering with anger. "Is that what I have become to you? Is that the manner in which you speak to me now? It used to be that you told me all your business, and occasionally I was asked for my advice. Noel, let us be frank. Have you ceased to care for me?"

She looked at him recklessly, and he gazed down at her in some surprise. Once he was

tempted to tell her the whole truth, and then the memory came to him of what she would suffer. In spite of her pride, she had told him how she loved him and he had never doubted her. He could not pain her like that, and summoning all his courage, he looked down at her and smiled.

"You are a foolish girl, Mabel," he said, striving to speak naturally. "If I had ceased to care, do you not think that you would be the first to know?"

A living flame leaped into her cheeks, a wild fire into her eyes. She went a step nearer to him and lifted her face to his. Her voice was scarcely more than a whisper.

"Then," she cried, desperately, "there is something that I have to propose to you. I can bear this no longer. There was a time when you wished that our engagement should not be a long one, and I laughed at you; but circumstances have transpired that have changed me. Now, Noel, I ask you to let our engagement end, but let it end at once in marriage. What have you to say?"

He looked down at her. His head reeled. He could scarcely believe it possible that the words he had heard had come from Mabel Naylor, and then the necessity for reply came to him. He drew his breath hard, and thought rapidly; but there was but one cry that could be voiced in his heart, and that the uncertain one of:

"What am I to do?"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THERE was but one reply that Noel Chatteris could make to the request that Mabel Naylor had made of him. She was his betrothed wife. In the days that were dead he had asked that their engagement might be a short one, and had even insisted that the marriage should take place at once.

Could he tell her that he had changed his mind—that he no longer loved her? Or that he was not ready to be married? If she asked him for a reason what one should he give to her?

He could think of nothing. His mind seemed to be an absolute blank. He was staring at her; but suddenly she seemed to have lost the proportions of a beautiful woman, and was a hideous demon, with the fires of perdition flaming from her eyes, her tongue alive with taunts and jeers.

And she seemed to read his thoughts as she might have done a printed page. She saw all the struggle, understood all his repugnance, realised that his love had gone from her for ever, but it moved her not at all, except to anger.

She was determined that she would be his wife, let the cost be to her what it might, and then there would be time enough in which to think of her revenge.

She did not interrupt the conflict by word or breath, but she listened to the voice that she would never have recognised, with something like savage pleasure, as he made answer:

"If it is your desire to become my wife at once, Mabel, I have no other will."

She had not expected to win so easily; but she understood readily enough that her ally was his honour, and to that she owed her victory.

She uttered a little purring cry like that of a treacherous cat, and hid her face for a moment upon his shoulder, then she drew him closely beside her upon the divan.

"You are so good to me, Noel," she said, in a low, half-tremulous tone. "There is nothing that has ever come between us except this one that is at present in the courts, and I have been very foolish about that. I want to tell you, dear, how very sorry I am that I have asked you to give it up, and to assure you that it was only my abominable pride that ever caused me to make the demand. To prove to you that I am in earnest, dear, I want you to bring the—little girl here to me. I will take her, Noel, and—"

"You have not heard, then?" he interrupted, heavily, turning his truthful eyes from her.

"Heard what?"

"That Olive has disappeared."

"You don't mean—"

"I mean that she has gone, Heaven knows

where. That she did not go of her own will I am convinced; but how she went, or where, or with whom, is more than I can surmise. Don't let us speak of it, Mabel. I fear the worst for her, poor child."

"And to think that I have censured you for attempting to help her. I feel very like a criminal, Noel, I wish I could tell you how ashamed and sorry I am, dear."

She looked up at him. There were tears in her eyes. Her lid quivered, and for the first time in weeks, he bent his head and kissed her of his own accord. His heart warmed toward her even as it had hardly done in the old days, when he thought he loved her. She could have strangled him for it; but it would have taken a better physiognomist than he to have read that under the face that was upturned to his.

"I knew you would feel that way when you reflected," he said, with more gentleness than he had used toward her in some time. "I knew that when you recovered from your very natural anger you would understand that she, poor child, was not to blame for anything that has occurred. You are a very generous and noble woman, Mabel. I feel that this thing has made rather a strained feeling between us for some time, and I am truly glad that it is at an end."

"Oh, it will be so much better when we are married, Noel! There can come nothing between us then. You will make me see with your honest and just eyes. You will help me to overcome the haughty pride that is the curse of my nature. You will supply me with the qualities that my nature lacks, and I will be everything that you wish me, because I love you, Noel."

"And Heaven helping me, I will try to deserve your love, Mabel. When do you wish this marriage to take place, dear?"

A few minutes before he could scarcely have brought himself to ask that question, but he had resolved that the sacrifice must be made to his honour, and the trial was not so severe after what she had said. It was asked, therefore, in a tone that showed more of interest and less of death than he had done before, and she looked upon her work with more satisfaction. There was even a gleam of triumph in her eyes, but she felt a little timid shrinking at what she was about to propose to him, nevertheless.

"Right away; the sooner the better—to-night or to-morrow."

He caught his breath in surprise, crying out in a way that sounded despairing,—

"So soon!"

She was too much excited to hear tones now, and leaning over, she placed her scorching hand upon his cold one.

"Yes," she answered huskily; "to-night, if it can be so arranged. But there is another request that I have to make of you, Noel. Promise me that you will grant it."

"Let me hear it first."

"It is that our marriage may remain a secret for a time. Just a few weeks, dear, until—"

He shook her hand off and rose suddenly, facing her almost sternly.

"I am aware, Mabel," he said, quietly, "that you must have some tremendous reason for proposing a thing like that to me, but I tell you now that I will not do it. I am perfectly willing to comply with your request, and make you my wife at once; but the course that you wish me to follow afterward is not honourable, and I am surprised that you ask it of me."

"But, Noel, you don't understand. Listen." "It is useless—worse than useless. There is nothing that could make me consent—nothing. Your father trusts me, and I will never betray his confidence."

"Then let my father be present at the ceremony, and keep it a secret from the rest of the world. It is only for a little while, Noel."

Her tone was so pleading that he looked down at her in surprise.

"Why do wish it, Mabel?" he asked, in a curious tone.

She hung her head for a moment, as if in shame, then lifted it suddenly.

"You will think I am so weak," she answered, "utterly unworthy of being your wife, when I have told you, Noel, and yet I can't help it! It

is all the result of that abominable pride that has been the curse of my life. But you know that I am as powerless to conquer it as the voice of man is to stop the changing of the tide. I am afraid that the world would say that I married you to keep you from implicating my father in a crime."

He started, as if she had struck him, it seemed to him such an extraordinary thing for her to say. He looked at her for a moment in silence; then asked hoarsely,—

"Do you think there is anyone in all the world who would believe such an absurdity as that your father was interested in the murder of Olive Farquhar?"

She was trembling from head to foot. Her face flushed, then paled. She felt that the moment that would decide everything was upon them. Her voice was low and thrilling as she replied,—

"There are those in the world who are ready to believe anything that is sensational, and I had rather die than have anyone know that I am afraid to face the inquiry!"

She paused and looked at him. There was a question crying aloud in his heart, but one that his manhood would not allow him to voice to a helpless woman.

"And you are afraid to face the inquiry? It is this which causes you to wish me to make you my wife at once?"

It seemed cowardly of her, and yet he did not like her the less for that. Somehow, a great sympathy for her was born in his heart. Had some fear of what her father might have done in the past entered her heart, and was she crying out to him to save her?

All his chivalry was roused. He would do his duty to Vincent Farquhar, that unhappy wretch who had suffered for another's crime, but the stain of it all should not touch this innocent one, if the result should recoil upon her father. For she was innocent! That thought he repeated, as if to give himself strength, as he knelt beside her and encircled her waist with his arm.

"I don't think I exactly understand your meaning, Mabel," he said, gently; "but you know that you can trust me, dear. If it will make you any more comfortable to become my wife at once, I am willing that it should be done. And if you really wish that it should be secret from all the world except your father, I will yield the point."

"When? When?"

"To-morrow at this hour."

She flung her arms about his neck and burst into a passion of tears. They were genuine enough, too, but they changed into a hysterical laugh when he had left her ten minutes later.

"Ha! ha! ha!" she cried, wildly. "I shall win, Maurice Lemaitre. We shall see! We shall see! Nor is it you alone upon whom I shall take my revenge, but upon Olive Farquhar as well, she who has stolen his heart from me!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

THERE was not much sleep for either Olive or Jack upon that first night of their enforced stay in the cottage by the bayou.

Jack strove with all his might to believe that what he had done was right. He tried to convince himself that Maurice Lemaitre was acting only in the manner that they had agreed upon, but to save his life he could not control that wild fear that he was all wrong and Olive right. He could not look into her truthful eyes and believe that any one in the whole world could ever have persuaded her to do that which was against her conscience. He tried to believe the best of Lemaitre, but somehow the best seemed very bad. He knew that under any circumstances, let the matter result as it might, he had acted very foolishly, very boyishly, and the thought was not comforting.

And Olive!

It was seldom indeed that she could not see some hope in a situation, however forlorn it might be, but there seemed none in this.

She had never exactly trusted Lemaitre. There had always seemed to be something under

the beauty of his face that repelled her, and there had always been something in the brilliancy of his dark eye that reminded her forcibly of the snake. She persuaded Jack into telling her his entire conversation with Lemaitre, and shrank from him with renewed fear when he told her that Maurice loved her.

She had taken a thorough survey of their surroundings before going to bed, but there seemed no hope of escape, and she threw herself upon the bed, fully dressed, never even desiring sleep, but to think over their situation, and, if possible, form some plan. Toward morning she fell into a deep sleep, and did not awaken until Jack came into the room.

They ate their breakfast, which was fairly good considering their surroundings, and then sat down, facing each other. The old woman had refused to utter one word when she brought and removed the trays, and both the children saw that they had nothing to expect from her. They had barely commenced to analyze the situation, when they were startled by the sudden entrance of Maurice Lemaitre himself.

Jack uttered a little cry of delight and sprang up, hobbling toward the man whom he still believed to be his friend, but Olive sat there, cold and pale as a statue.

"At last!" cried Jack, seizing the man's hand and shaking it warmly. "Why did you not come last night? I have been so frightened. What has detained you?"

"Business," answered Lemaitre, with a smile. "Had I known that such a warm welcome awaited me, I might have been here before. Olive, have you no word for me?"

"Yes," she answered, rising and looking at him coldly. "I wish to know why you have inveigled my brother into inducing me to come to this place? I wish to know why we are detained here against our will—as prisoners."

Lemaitre laughed lightly. "Upon my word, Jack," he cried, "one would think that I was Bluebeard, and that you would both be found to-morrow hanging by the hair of your heads!"

"Do you mean that we are not prisoners? Do you mean that we are not to be detained?" inquired Olive.

"I hope not. Jack, suppose you leave me for a few minutes alone with your sister. There are a few things that I should like to say to her."

"Certainly, sir," answered Jack, eagerly. Then when Lemaitre was about to close the door between them, he added, in a low tone: "I think you were mistaken, sir, about what you thought; but she will convince you."

Lemaitre smiled and closed the door. Then he returned to Olive, and taking the seat facing her, motioned her to resume her chair. She did so in silence, waiting for him to speak.

He found it rather harder than he had expected; but after an awkward pause, he began,—

"I suppose Jack has told you the reason of our bringing you here, Olive, has he not?"

"He has told me some ridiculous nonsense about fearing that I had fallen in with people who were not good, and wishing to rescue me from their evil influence; but I tell you frankly, Mr. Lemaitre, that I am neither the fool nor the child that I look. You may be able to impose upon Jack's credulity, but you could never make me believe such nonsense as that. I don't wish to talk to you upon this subject. You are insulting not only my friends, but the people whom you call yours as well. Why, if you feared so much for my welfare, did you not come to me like a man and tell me?"

"Because you would not have believed me, and I saw that heroic measures were the only ones that I could use with you, because you would still believe in Noel Chatteris, though a thousand voices were lifted against him."

"You are quite right," she exclaimed, haughtily. "I would believe in him; I do believe in him, knowing him to be a god beside those who would traduce him. It is you who are the coward and the scoundrel, Maurice Lemaitre, in that you force me here to this secluded spot in order to compel me to listen to you while you repeat the vile slander you have dared to utter to that unhappy boy in there."

A slow fire gathered in Maurice Lemaitre's eyes. If he had intended to spare her, her words were most unfortunate in that they angered him. A passionate crimson burned in either cheek; but there was a smile upon his lips, and his manner was easy as he arose from his chair, and leaning his hand upon its back, looked down upon her.

"There is no reason why you should have said that to me, Olive," he exclaimed, quietly. "I have never shown you that I was less than your friend. I have tried to benefit you in every way. Your gratitude is what I might have expected."

"I fail to see what gratitude you can expect when you lock me up in a place like this against my will—when you tell vile stories of the noblest man that the world holds."

Maurice laughed.

"That is very pretty and theatrical, but I suppose you do not take into consideration the fact that this hero is an engaged man?"

"That concerns neither you nor me."

"Are you sure that it does not concern you? My dear girl, you are very young. You perhaps do not take into consideration the fact that this man loves you, has told you so, and in the same breath made you understand that you could never be his wife. That was an insult to you."

"And pray, may I ask by what right Mr. Lemaitre has constituted himself my guardian?"

"By the right of the man who loves you—by the right of the man who would give his life to make you happy. Listen to me, Olive."

"I had much rather not."

"But you must! You shall! I love you. You are the first woman to whom I have ever spoken those words in all my life, and I swear to you that they are true. I, who have been called the coldest of men, have become a fire-brand at the touch of your hand, hesitating at nothing that could bring me your love. It has made a madman of me. I adore you, worship you, and I want you for my wife!"

She had listened to him in much surprise. There was something in his face which made her understand that he was speaking the truth, and a great pity filled her heart. She remembered her own love for Noel, and could thereby understand more of his suffering.

Lemaitre's manner had grown intense as he spoke; his voice trembled, and there was a strained look about the eyes that was new to their expression. His colour had faded, also, and he had grown very pale. For the first time in his life he seemed to have lost himself in his emotion.

"I am very sorry," Olive stammered. "Believe me, I did not know, did not even dream of this!"

"But now that you do know, what is your answer to me?"

"What it ever must remain, deeply as I regret it, but I cannot be your wife!"

"You prefer to accept dishonour from him rather than—"

"Mr. Lemaitre, you insult me! I cannot listen—"

"But you shall!" he interrupted, hoarsely, catching her by the arm as she rose from her chair. "You shall; I tell you that I am determined you shall be mine!"

"And I tell you that I would die first! I was foolish enough to be sorry for you a moment ago, but now I despise you. There is no suffering that I would not undergo rather than be your wife. We shall see whose will is stronger, yours or mine."

"Do you think you ever could cope with me? Why, you poor little fool, do you know where you are now? You are miles from any habitation. You are in a cottage that the people call haunted, and avoid as they would a scourge. You are where you could not even breathe the fresh air of heaven unless I willed it so. You are absolutely my prisoner, and as such you shall remain until you consent to make my will your law. You have been treated well so far, but I tell you now that you may expect no such in the event of your proving obstinate. Your brother will be taken away at the end of the third day. At the end of the fourth you will be left without light, and at the end of the fifth you will be put upon bread and water, and kept like that until you consent to

accede to my wishes. You know my ultimatum. I am going now to leave you to think over the situation. You need expect no quarter. I shall receive your messages through the woman who will bring you your meals. *Au revoir.*"

He bowed to her with mock courtesy, his face crimson again with passion, then he took a key from his pocket, unlocked the door, and passed out.

She heard him upon the stairs as he went down, lightly whistling an air from an opera, as if he had been making a happy call.

She went to the door that separated her from Jack and flung it open. He was crouching upon a chair, as if half-dazed with surprise and horror. "Did you hear?" she asked, hoarsely.

He nodded.

"Then for the love of Heaven come in and help me to think what we are to do."

CHAPTER XXX.

WHEN Olive did not reappear upon the night following her leaving the home of Grace Thornton, the excitement was intense. Every one had something to suggest as to the cause of her protracted absence. Every tongue seemed desirous of giving expression to a thought at the same moment, and there was the babble of many voices; but there was one among the number who sat apart, silent and large-eyed, listening but saying nothing.

It was Nurse Dawson.

A shiver seemed to pass over her now and then, and an expression of great pain came into her sad eyes, but her tongue seemed paralysed. It seemed to her that she could not have spoken if her life had depended upon it.

She knew that Jack had been taken care of during the last few eventful days by Maurice Lemaitre; and she knew that Jack had disappeared with Olive, she knew that Jack had written the note whereby she was summoned. She knew that they had gone in a carriage, and she knew that neither of them had money to hire a carriage. She put all that together, and then added to it other things that she had seen, and knew that the chain of circumstances involving Maurice in their disappearance was strong indeed.

She knew her disreputable son thoroughly, and she knew that there was little at which he would hesitate if he wished to carry a point. But she had borne her part in his villainies as long as she could; she could endure it no more.

She loved Maurice as mothers always love the black sheep of their flock; but Nurse Dawson's conscience was on fire. Still, she waited till the morning of the third day before going to him, hoping against hope that Olive would return.

When she realized that such a contingency was no longer to be expected, she determined that she would risk everything and go to his rooms. She made some excuse to Grace for her absence, and hurrying out, she took a cab and drove to the rooms where she knew that she would find her son.

He was lying upon a sofa, as she entered, with a cigar between his lips, the aromatic smoke curling above his handsome head, the picture of luxurious ease. He did not rise when he recognized her, but indifferently took the cigar from between his teeth.

"What are you doing here?" he asked, curtly. "I have told you dozens of times that you must not come here. It would be injurious to your reputation, as well as mine, if people knew of your visits."

He smiled as he said it, but there was not much smile on the grim lips of his mother. She dropped into a chair before him, leaning her arm upon a table by her side, and looked at him for a moment without replying; then she said, with a tone of the aching heart in her voice,—

"Have you no conscience whatever, Maurice? Is there nothing in you that is good? Do you know no influence in life save self?"

"Good Heavens! Have you come here to deliver me another sermon? Spare me, I beg of you!"

"I have come to ask you what you have done with Olive Farquhar."

"What I have done with her! What are you talking of? Do you mean to accuse me of having made away with the young lady?"

"Don't trifle with me, Maurice. I confess that I have been very easily ruled in the past, but I shall not be so again. I am tired of all this guilt and sin. I shall not be your silent accomplice any longer. I have borne the burden of it as long as I can. I don't propose that you shall harm a hair in that sweet child's head. Surely, you have done enough. Maurice, I demand her back!"

He lifted himself upon his elbow, and looked at her with half-closed eyes through the volumes of smoke that were curling about him.

"Are you mad?" he asked, indifferently. "What do you suppose I know about the girl? What interest do you think I can have in her?"

"I confess that your motives are too deep and dark for me to analyze, but I am convinced that you could tell me where she is, if you wished to do so. I command you to do so!"

"I might laugh at your absurdity, if you were not so tragical in it. I don't know where the young woman is, and, not wishing to be impolite to my respected ancestress, I don't care!"

"That is false! You do care, you do know! You told me a falsehood the other day, Maurice. You told me that you expected to marry Miss Naylor."

"That is the truth. She is my promised wife."

"And you told me that you loved her."

"I do."

"It is false! Do you think that I know you so little? Do you think that I have studied you all my life for nothing? Do you think that you can conceal any of your guilty secrets from me? I discovered even that which I was not seeking. I found out about Marcus Naylor when I would rather have lost my life than to have discovered you to be the accomplice of such a crime. I know you, Maurice, as I do not believe you even know yourself. You extracted from me a promise, but you did it with a lie. You told me that you loved Mabel Naylor, and five minutes afterwards I knew that you had spoken that which was not true, for I saw your face as you were passing the parlour door. I knew that you had overheard a conversation between Olive and Mr. Chatteris, and I knew then, Maurice, that it was not Mabel Naylor you loved but Olive Farquhar."

"Ha! ha! ha! Upon my word, that is better than a play. If you think I am so much in love with her, why do you think I do not marry her?"

"Because she does not love you, and because you want to secure the money and social prestige of the other one. You have taken her away, but by Heaven, Maurice, you shall bring her back, or you shall be a greater sufferer than she!"

"You must be mad."

"No; though I have undergone enough to make me mad. I have been mad to keep your vile secrets, but I shall be so no longer. Will you bring that girl back to me?"

He sat up, flung his cigar into the fire, and looked at her.

"No," he said, slowly. "I don't see how you can expect me to do that when I don't know where she is. Don't be a fool, mother. I know no more of her than you do."

"That is not true. There are others who suspect you as well as I."

"Others! Who?"

"Mr. Chatteris."

"Curse him!"

Lemaitre had leaped to his feet. The excitement in his face, the crimson flush, the oath that left his lips, all proved to the watchful woman that her surmises were but too correct.

She arose swiftly and laid her hand upon his arm.

"You know where Olive Farquhar is!" she cried, below her breath.

"And if I do, what then?" he exclaimed, hotly.

"She is where neither you nor he will ever find her. You think you can force me to speak by revealing all you know. I am not afraid of you. Listen: you don't want to see your only son behind the bars of a prison cell; yet there is

where I should be if you told the story that you know, and you are quite aware of that fact. You cannot be so unnatural a mother that you would place me there with your own hands. Now go and tell this story, if you wish; but remember that in the hour you do it, you will make a suicide of me."

"Oh, Maurice! for the love of Heaven, hush! You know I love you, and yet you force me to listen to words like these. Give up the girl, dear, and I will say no more. I swear to you that I will keep the other guilty secret, if you will but do that."

He thought for a moment. He remembered how completely Olive could ruin him if she ever left that place, and with dogged determination he thought of his love for her, and answered,—

"I can't do it. I don't know where she is."

"Maurice, think. You are speaking falsely. I could not have a crime like that upon my conscience, and unless you promise to restore her, I must speak!"

A terrible oath left his lips. He caught her by the shoulder and looked into her face.

"Are you not afraid," he hissed, "that I shall keep you here? Are you not afraid that I shall kill you?"

The words seemed to calm her. She looked at him unflinchingly.

"No," she answered. "Since I know what you are I thought of all that. I wrote out the whole confession, with proofs, and left them in the hands of a person whom I can trust. I told that person that if I were not home within two hours from the time that I left, that the papers were to be opened. Now, Maurice, you see you are in my power. Will you be guided by me, or will you not?"

He flung her from him with another oath, and walked swiftly up and down the floor for a little time, then he paused before her, his brows drawn angrily, his face dark as night.

"Curse your interference!" he cried hoarsely. "You will ruin everything. But I can do nothing about the girl, since I don't know where she is."

But the sentence was not finished.

He had given no order to his servant, and as he stood there, with that sullen expression upon his countenance, the door was flung open, and the man announced,—

"Mr. Chatteris."

And before Lemaitre could recover from his surprise, or Mrs. Dawson rearrange her bonnet, which, in the excitement, had got upon the side of her head, Noel Chatteris stood before them.

CHAPTER XXXI.

NOEL CHATTERIS was silent through surprise; Mrs. Dawson and Maurice Lemaitre were silent through consternation.

Lemaitre saw at once that some explanation of the remarkable situation was necessary, and rallying his wits, he smiled carelessly, and said, quietly,—

"Come in, Mr. Chatteris. A visit from you is a pleasure that is not often accorded me. Mrs. Dawson has been growing excited. She has a nephew, as grand a rascal as ever saw the light of day, who has been forging my name to some cheques. She has come to me to make a plea for him; but I tell her that I have not the right to do it. If I spare him, he is more than likely to victimize someone else, and I should thereby be doing a direct harm to the community. Mrs. Dawson thinks I am altogether hard of heart and uncompromising in my cruelty, but I am sure that as a disinterested person you agree with me; do you not?"

Noel glanced from Lemaitre to Mrs. Dawson.

She was leaning against the wall, apparently breathless, gazing at her son. Her chin had dropped, and as plainly as the words were read upon the wall at the feast of Belshazzar, Noel saw imprinted across her countenance: "It is a lie that he is telling! A lie! A lie!"

And then a quick process of reasoning was born in that astute lawyer's brain.

"Why is Mrs. Dawson in the bachelor apart-

ments of Maurice Lemaitre? Why do I find them engaged in an exciting controversy? Why are both so upset at my appearance? And why, when I have not questioned him at all, does Maurice Lemaitre think it necessary to explain the situation with a lie?"

There was not time for him to frame answers to his own mental queries. He bowed coldly to Lemaitre and said, in his accustomed voice, with perhaps a trace of ice in it,—

"I am always upon the side of mercy, Mr. Lemaitre. At least, it justifies an error."

Maurice smiled agreeably.

"With the weight of majority against me, it seems that I have nothing to do but yield; but I should like a little more time for consideration. Mrs. Dawson, will you call again to-morrow?"

She neither replied nor altered her position. She seemed like some statue of horror carved from granite. It is doubtful if she even heard him, but Noel's voice reached her as he said,—

"I suppose there was no news of Miss Farquhar when you left home, Mrs. Dawson?"

She turned her eyes upon him swiftly, eagerly, then some slight noise from Maurice's direction caused her to again look at him. A slow shiver passed over her from head to foot, and in a voice as hollow as that which comes through a vault, she answered,—

"None!"

Not a movement, not a glance, not an expression was lost to Noel. His every faculty was on the alert. The trace that he had already discovered made him suspicious. He had come to Lemaitre for a frank explanation of all these things, and now was but the more convinced that there was even greater ground for suspicion than he had thought.

With the swiftness of lightning he mentally went over the situation. It seemed to him that heroic measures were the only ones to be adopted. He thought that the only course promising hope was to strike a most decisive blow then and there. At all events it could do no harm.

During the momentary pause that had followed her monosyllable, Mrs. Dawson had dropped her head and was starting toward the door; but Chatteris, who was standing between it and her, did not alter his position. He stood there, erect and calm, barring her egress; but, as if he suspected nothing of her intention, he said, quietly,—

"I have. She was a charge of yours in her baby days, was she not, Mrs. Dawson?"

"Yes," stammered the woman.

"And you loved her, did you not?"

"Heaven knows I did."

"You knew her mother and her suffering father? You believed the accusation against him to be unjust, did you not?"

She shrunk back from him, pressing her hands upon her breast, and uttered a little cry. He had expected merely a monosyllabic answer to that, and was surprised at the hunted expression that came in her eyes. It was the expression of a pleading animal.

Noel went up to her and placed his hand gently, kindly upon her shoulder. He looked down into her frightened eyes, and in a tone of voice that betrayed the presence of tears, he said,—

"I think he is dying, Mrs. Dawson. He heard of his daughter's disappearance, and the shock, I fear, has killed him. It is a horrible thing, is it not, for him to die with that dreadful accusation against him, if he be innocent? More horrible since all the world believes it true. It is infinitely worse to die, not knowing what fate has befallen his helpless daughter. If you ever pitied Vincent Farquhar, Mrs. Dawson, you should see him now. Emaciated to the last degree, his great wild eyes staring like nothing that is human, he raises himself in bed as if thereby to get nearer to Heaven in order to pray that his life may be spared sufficiently long to prove his innocence and find his daughter. He asks nothing more than that. He is killing himself in his effort to cling to life for that purpose. He—"

The man's voice was drowned in the sobs that broke from the woman's lips.

She fell upon her knees before him and caught his hand in hers, then bowing her head upon her arm, she almost screamed aloud.

Maurice came forward. His face was working with passion and fear. He was ghostly in his pallor. He would have caught her by the shoulder, but with his disengaged hand Noel flung him back as he would have thrown a child.

He put his arm about Mrs. Dawean's shoulders and lifted her up.

"You are exciting that foolish woman uselessly," cried Lemaitre, trying to speak in a natural tone, but not succeeding by a great degree. "I don't like such scenes in my house. I—"

But Noel had seen too much to allow the opportunity to slip by.

"It is her sympathy for a suffering man," he said, with unconscious dramatic effect—"a man who has borne all that he can, and must die accused and found guilty of a crime he never committed; a man—"

"But he shall not!" cried the woman, hoarsely, madly. "He shall not! I will tell all to the world now. I can bear it no longer. For Heaven's sake, have pity upon me! Vincent Farquhar never committed that crime. I know the name of the man who did it!"

"Woman, are you mad?"

The cry came from Maurice. He thrust his white, distorted face into hers, his eyes gleaming like balls of fire. His breath was hot enough to have scorched her, and he seemed possessed of the strength of a demon.

With all Noel's strength he could not move him. He had placed his rigid hand upon the arm of his mother with a grip that must have been torture; but, to Noel's surprise, she did not even flinch from it.

She turned her eyes upon Lemaitre, and in a voice which Chatteris never forgot, she cried out:

"Yes, I am mad, and you have made me so! I have borne your guilty secret until now—I can endure it no longer. You have but yourself to blame, Heaven help you! I cannot let that man die accused, knowing the horrible secret as I have known it for all these years. Heaven help me, that I must accuse my own son in order that justice may be done. Mr. Chatteris, Vincent Farquhar is innocent!"

"Will you be quiet?"

The exclamation came from Lemaitre. He drew her closer to him, his countenance black as that of a devil; but she found strength to throw him off.

"No!" she cried, wildly, "I will not!"

With the quickness of a cat, Noel placed himself between them. He caught her by the arm and lightly threw her behind the corner of the piano, placing himself in front of her where he could protect her.

"Tell me the truth quickly," he gasped. "I swear that you shall be protected!"

"Remember that the moment you speak, you destroy not only the reputation, but the life of your own son!" cried Maurice.

But she did not seem to hear him. She was gazing straight into Noel's eyes; but some movement on the part of Lemaitre attracted him. The man had sprung toward a table. A revolver was lying upon it. He seized it and levelled it toward his mother.

In another instant a ball would have gone crashing through her brain, but the hand that held the pistol was thrown up, and the ball entered the wall perhaps three feet above.

The noise seemed to bring Lemaitre somewhat to his senses, and he dropped the smoking weapon at his feet; but even her narrow escape from death did not seem to affect Mrs. Dawson at all.

She had struggled with her conscience all those years, and longer silence was as impossible to her as for a river to remain in bounds when the dam is broken.

"It was Marcus Naylor who killed Olive Farquhar, the wife of Vincent Farquhar!" she cried, her voice rising above the confusion, "and that man there who calls himself Maurice Lemaitre, helped him to conceal the crime!"

(To be continued.)

THE moon gives out heat enough to affect the thermometer, and make a difference of two or three degrees.

FACETIE.

You may jocularly tell a man he's a lyre, but it isn't wise to harp on it too much.

The man who can tell what he has seen in his travels is intelligent, but the man who can't is positively brilliant.

WOMAN'S work is never done. That's the reason she oughtn't to complain. Now a man has to do his work or lose his situation.

"Is it a boy or a girl?" queried the impatient father. "It's a poet," said the frivolous doctor. "What do you mean?" "Well, it's born, not maid."

PORKER: "Sir, what do you mean by walking over that lady's foot?" New Yorker: "Thunderation, man, do you think I've got wings?"

JONES: "Why don't you lay by something for a rainy day?" Brown: "I have done so. I'm keeping the umbrella Smith lent me a week ago."

YOUR coffee possesses both a good and a bad quality. "What do you mean by that, sir?" "Good, because it contains no chicory; bad, because it contains no coffee."

HAIRDRESSER: "You are getting quite bald, sir. Can't I recommend something for your head?" Mr. Hurry: "Yes; I'd like my hat as soon as possible."

"HAWLEY has gone to the Riviera." "What for?" "Rheumatism." "Just like that stupid fellow Hawley. Couldn't he get enough of that up here?"

"WHAT! Got your patent leather boots blacked, and bought them only ten days ago! Wasn't the leather any good?" "The leather is all right, but the patent seems to have expired."

FRENCH Visitor: "What a fine new coat Willie's got. I thought you told me, little man, you were not going to have a new one this winter." Little Idiot: "Ah, but I caught a kissing chambermaid."

Two brothers were dining together at a Florence restaurant. "I say, Filippo," remarked one of them, "doesn't this wine taste as if there were a dash of water in it?" "A dash of wine in the water, most likely!" was the reply.

FRIEND: "You took your son into your establishment some months ago to teach him the business, I understand. How did it turn out?" Business Man (wearily): "Great success. He's teaching me now."

LANDLADY: "I don't know how it is, but I cannot keep the milk from getting sour, although I always keep it in a refrigerator." Boarder: "Why don't you try the oil stove that's in my room?"

"Did you come across any brigands in Sicily?" "Plenty. But I always got the better of them."

"How so?" "Oh, simply enough. Every time I met a suspicious-looking character on the road I went up to him and asked an alms."

"What did Neighbob say when you told him you wanted to marry his daughter?" "He didn't absolutely refuse, but he imposed a very severe condition." "What was it?" "He said he would see me hanged first."

A LITTLE boy, writing a composition on the zebra, was requested to describe the animal, and to mention what it was useful for. After deep reflection, he wrote: "The zebra is like a horse, only striped. It is chiefly used to illustrate the letter Z."

GEORGINA: "John Henry, wake up. There's some one in the house. Oh, what shall we do?" John Henry: "Hush-sh-h. I hear him; he's rummaging the pantry now. Keep perfectly quiet, and he may eat some of that pie you made yesterday. Then we'll have him."

MRS. GAZZAM: "George, dear, here's an article on how to keep moths out of sealskin sacsques." Gazzam: "That can't be of much interest to you, as you have no sealskin sacsques." Mrs. Gazzam: "That was what I wished to direct your attention to, love."

"I WAS getting measured for a suit of clothes this mawning," said young Mr. Sissy to his pretty cousin, "and just for a joke, y'know, I asked Snipen if it really took nine tailors to make a man. He said it would take more than nine tailors to make a man of some people. I thought it was quite clever."

"I suppose you know," said the indulgent parent to the anxious suitor, "that my daughter has been reared in the lap of luxury?" "Yes, sir, I know that. Still, I am glad you mentioned it, for it convinces me that you realize the importance of making us a liberal allowance to live upon."

EDITOR: "No, my dear sir; as a posthumous poem, these verses would be good. But I do not see my way clear to publishing them just now." Poet: "But what advantage would it be to me to have them published after my death?" "I cannot say, my dear sir. But a posthumous poem is especially valuable in the fact that it assures the reader that no more will be written by the same author."

LITTLE Juanito sat up in his cot in the middle of the night crying, "Ma, I'm so thirsty!" "Be still, child, and go to sleep; you are not thirsty—not you!" "But, ma, I must have a glass of water, I'm so thirsty!" cried Juanito, after a pause. "If you don't go to sleep this minute, I'll come with the rod!" "All right, ma; if you're getting up to thrash me, you might bring a glass of water with you."

"WELL, gentlemen," said Tompkins to a couple of friends, "you can talk as much as you please about the inferiority of women, but there are lots of them that can discount most of us for brains. Take my wife, for instance, she's got twice as much sense as I have, and I ain't ashamed to acknowledge it either." "But don't you think," said one of his auditors, "that you put rather a low estimate on your wife's intellectual powers?"

A PERT young Scotch advocate, whose case had gone against him, had the temerity to exclaim that "he was much astonished at such a decision," whereupon the court was about to commit him to jail, when John Scott, afterward Lord Eldon, the counsel on the other side, interfered in his favour: "My lords, my learned friend is young; if he had known your lordships as long as I have done, he would not have expressed astonishment at any decision of your lordships"—an apology which seemed to satisfy the court.

MANY of the brilliant statesmen of France have had the gift of terse, witty expression. It has served them when elaborate arguments would have been far less impressive. When Turgot was minister, some one enthusiastically advocated a certain method of raising money for the Government. Turgot disposed of the subject shortly and vigorously. His judgment was known to be good, and little more was heard of the tax in question after he wrote on the memorial: "It would be safer to execute the author than the project."

ALEXANDER H. H. STUART, when filling a responsible post under the United States Government, was very much annoyed by a persistent applicant for the post of messenger. The man came in regularly every day for several weeks, until he became an unbearable bore. Finally, one day, after the man had gone out, Stuart asked the messenger then in office if he knew what that man was after. He said, "No, sir." "Well," said Stuart, "he wants your place, and if I ever see him again he shall have it." Stuart never saw the man again.

THESE are a few of his sentiments: "There is no act of treachery or meanness of which a political party is not capable, for in politics there is no honour." "A smile for a friend and a sneer for the world is the way to govern mankind." "O politics, though splendid juggle!" "Mankind, then, is my great game." "Am I then an intellectual Don Juan, reckless of human minds, as he was of human bodies—aspirational libertine?" And here is his description of his *alter ego*:—"A young adventurer, alike unconnected with his race in blood or in love; a being ruling all things by the power of his own genius, and reckless of all consequences save his own prosperity."

SOCIETY.

THE Baroness Burdett-Coutts is one of the very few women who possess the freedom of the city of London and E. S. Burgh.

THE Emperor of Austria has presented a silver medal to a female servant who has, in his judgment, earned it by remaining seventy years in the service of one family.

THE Prince of Wales, as everyone knows, is one of the best after-dinner speakers to be found in this country, and if report may be believed, the Duke of York has inherited the gift.

THE German Express and her children are to reside for two months during the summer at Sassnitz, in the island of Rugen, where the Villa Seehof has been taken for them. Sassnitz is a pretty little watering-place on the shore of the Baltic, situated at the mouth of a picturesque ravine leading to the beautiful beech forest of Stubbenitz, which belongs to Prince Putbus, and extends along the coast for more than twelve miles and is one of the finest woodland domains in Germany.

THE Princess of Wales is well and looks well, but grief has taken away so much of the spring from her life that her Royal Highness, seems, in spite of the most self-sacrificing efforts, to be unable to regain any brightness of spirits. Those who can remember her Royal Highness's depression after the death of her infant son, Prince Alexander, who lived only one day, were prepared for any blow at family affection having a life-long effect on our well-loved Princess. It is, however, hoped that the cruise and the gradual resumption of the general interests of life will have an excellent effect.

THE Queen will place a portion of Balmoral Castle and the estate at the disposal of the Duke of York when he gets married. The Duke is very fond of Balmoral, and as he is a good deer-stalker he will have plenty of room for this excitable enjoyment on the Royal Highland estate. The private grounds at Balmoral where the Queen takes her favourite walks extend along the valley of the Dee for nearly a mile, and contain upward of one hundred and twenty acres, studded with trembling aspen, mountain ash, and weeping birch.

THE Princess Marie Louise of Parma has a tragic family history. Her grandfather, the Duke of Parma, was assassinated; her great-grandfather, the Duc de Berri, was assassinated; his father, Charles X., was dethroned and exiled; her grandmother "Mademoiselle," the sister of the exiled Heir of France, was notoriously an ill-treated and wretched wife. A century of disaster lies beyond the betrothal which unites two royal personages, whose respective families have undergone all the vicissitudes possible to royal fortunes. We hope that for them fate will make a new pronouncement that will never be read backward.

ON the birthdays of the Prince of Wales's family and during Lent the Princess of Wales usually wears her sacred Dagmar Cross, which, ages ago, belonged to Princess Margaret, daughter of King Ottocar of Bohemia, who was married to the Danish King Waldemar II. The memory of this Princess is cherished by the Danes with the deepest affection, and she is known by the name of Queen Dagmar—the lovely maiden of the day. This sacred cross which the Princess of Wales now wears was many years ago found in the tomb of Queen Dagmar, when it was opened by order of the King of Denmark. The cross was discovered suspended round the skeleton neck of the once beautiful Danish Queen. It is one of the earliest known specimens of the art, and it was so highly prized by the King of Denmark that he considered he could offer nothing more appropriate to the Princess of Wales on her marriage than this sacred cross. It is worn suspended from a magnificent necklace of pearls and diamonds which were given to her Royal Highness by her father.

STATISTICS.

THREE times as much spirits are consumed in Scotland, according to the population, as in England.

A LANCASHIRE acre comprises 7,840 square yards; a Cheshire acre, 10,240 square yards; an Irish acre, 7,840; and a Scotch acre, 6,104 square yards.

THE balance of a watch gives 5 vibrations every second, 300 every minute, 18,000 every hour, 432,000 every day, and 147,680,000 during the year.

ONE million and a half men work in the coal-mines of the world. Of these England has 535,000; United States, 300,000; Germany, 285,000; Belgium, 100,000; Russia, 41,000. The world's miners of metals number 4,000,000.

THE German Empire has 20,500 physicians, an increase of 21 per cent. in the last luster. Prussia has 12,074 of them. The number of physicians to each 10,000 inhabitants is 4.15. The number of hospitals is 3,109, and they contain 185,069 beds.

GEMS.

A TENDER conscience is a stronger obligation than a prison.

DEATH is the dropping of the flower that the fruit may swell.

THE gem is no less a gem, though trodden under foot in the dust.

SUCH as thy words are, such will thy affections be esteemed; and such will thy deeds as thy affections; and such thy life, as thy deeds.

ONE secret act of self-denial, one sacrifice of inclination to duty, is worth all the mere good thoughts, warm feelings, passionate prayers in which idle people indulge themselves.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

CRANBERRY SHORTCAKE.—Make a tender crust of one quart of flour, one quarter cup butter, and two teaspoonfuls of baking powder. When baked, split, butter, and spread thickly with cranberry sauce ready prepared. A dressing of whipped cream will be quite an addition. The shortcake will be better served hot.

EGGS AND CHEESE.—Two eggs, 2 oz. cheese, $\frac{1}{2}$ oz. butter, pepper and salt. Grate the cheese and put it in a small saucepan with the butter, and salt and pepper to taste. Break the egg into the pan, stir over the fire till it begins to thicken, then stir off the fire till it is a little thick. Have neat pieces of toast and pile the mixture on them, and serve hot.

BACON, CABBAGE, AND POTATOES.—About 1½ lbs. of a knuckle of a ham, 1 cabbage, 6 or 8 potatoes. Soak the bacon for an hour or two and scrape it thoroughly, wash it well, and put it in a big pot with plenty of cold water. Let it boil for two hours. Then have the cabbage cut in eight pieces, like the fifths of an orange, and put it in and boil for half-an-hour. Add the potatoes, very nicely pared, and boil till they are ready. Skin the bacon and put it on a large dish, put the cabbage and the potatoes round it, and a little of the liquid for sauce. It makes a very comfortable dinner.

IMITATION PRESERVED GINGER.—Four lbs. Newton pippins, 4 lbs. sugar, 1 oz. whole ginger; cut the apples in quarters, pare them and take out the cores. Put the apples in a basin of cold water. Put the skins and cores in the jellypan well covered with water and let them boil for half-an-hour, then strain. Now put the sugar, 4 breakfast cupful of the liquid the skins were boiled in, and the ginger into the pan to boil for ten minutes. Lift the apples out of the water and put them in among the syrup. Let the whole boil for three-quarters of an hour till they look transparent, then put into pots.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THE fixed stars are of all colours; violet, blue, green, and red predominating.

THE cabmen of Paris are now forbidden to smoke pipes while driving a fare.

THE best kid gloves are not made of kid, but of the skins of young colts. The cheapest kid gloves are made of lamb and rat skins.

HORSES are, it is said, just now so plentiful in Buenos Ayres that everybody has at least one. It is stated that even the beggars beg on horse-back.

A TELEGRAPHIC signal passes from end to end of the Atlantic cable, a distance of twenty-seven hundred miles, in less than one-third of a second.

FROGS and many fishes suffer no injury from freezing solid; while, in a few cases, even warm-blooded animals have been restored to life after apparent death from freezing.

BEFORE a fire company in Berlin starts for a fire, the members are drawn up in line, and in military fashion salute their captain; then off they run, having lost perhaps a minute.

UNDER Henry V. an act of Parliament ordered all geese in England to be counted and the sheriffs of the counties were required to furnish six arrow feathers from each goose.

VARIATIONS in the size of raindrops are attributed to atmospheric disturbances, and to the height from which they fall, those from a high altitude being much the smaller.

AT the foot of Mont Blanc, it is said, there stands the oldest chestnut tree in the world, with a circumference of 213 feet, and a known history of 2,000 years.

AT the table of the Regent Duke of Orleans it was the custom for the guest to drop a piece of gold in the plate from which he had just eaten a dish whose taste he fancied. This was probably the origin of the tip system.

A COMPANY has been formed at Copenhagen with the object of building a permanent Eiffel Tower in that city. The tower, which will be built of steel and iron, and lighted by electricity, is to be 1,670 feet in height.

THE common daphne grown in flower gardens is one of the most deadly poisons known to the botanist. Three or four of the berries will kill a man as quickly as strychnine, and one has been known to kill a child in half an hour.

SEVENTEEN private soldiers of the French army, in Bonaparte's time, by their bravery and talents raised themselves to the following distinguished stations: Two became kings; two princes; nine dukes; two field-marshal; and two generals.

EVERY Mussulman, however high his rank, from the Sultan down to the lowest dervish, is compelled to have a trade. The grandfather of the present Sultan was a toothpick-maker. The boatman, porter, or groom is eligible to the grade of Pasha. The butcher of to-day may be the Generalissimo of to-morrow, and the lowest slave may become Grand Vizier.

SIXTEEN years ago a senator of the Italian Parliament, while coming down an Alpine glacier at the height of 14,000 feet, dropped his coat into a crevasse. He was informed by the guides, knowing the annual rate of glacial movement, that it would probably come out from the mouth of the glacier in about seventeen years. Last August a party of tourists saw a coat in the moraine, and, on examination, it is claimed to have been the senator's.

VERY few people know that neither a turtle nor a tortoise nor a toad is provided with teeth. There is a general superstition that a turtle can bite off a man's finger, but the turtle can do nothing of the kind. Its jaws are very strong, and the horny membrane which runs round the jaw, where, in other animals teeth are found, is so hard and tough that the turtle can crush the bones of the hand to pulp, but as for biting off even a finger, the feat is, to the turtle, an impossibility.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

JANE.—See ANSWER to NOEL.

THE ROSE.—The thistle is the national emblem of Canada.

AROUR.—Egan has been released on an ordinary ticket-of-leave.

DISTRESSED MOTHER.—An illegitimate son cannot be compelled to support his parents.

LINA FERRIS.—We know of nothing that we could recommend to achieve the result desired.

WHIST.—It is illegal to play at cards in a public-house for stakes of any kind.

UNORTHODOX.—A marriage before a registrar costs about 9s. Notice must be given twenty-one days in advance.

TOM.—The safest way is to clip short with scissors and rub down stumps with a bit of pumice-stone and water.

LARGE FAMILY.—The eldest sister is in no way responsible for the care and maintenance of her brothers and sisters.

N. W.—No matter for what sum the merchant may be insured he will only be paid the amount that he can show he has lost.

AGGRIE.—Persons appointed executors may be witnesses to a will; but if they receive any benefit under it they forfeit their legacies.

JOE.—You are bound to give the month's notice; if you leave without doing so the landlord can recover the amount by proceedings in the county court.

M. W.—A man's family crest or coat-of-arms is his personal property; he can interdict any one from using it in any way whatever without his consent.

BEE.—The eggs are first boiled hard, the shells removed, and are either cut in half or in three portions, vinegar and spice being added in the usual manner.

ANXIOUS.—If the Home Rule Bill were defeated on the second reading in the House of Commons Mr. Gladstone would have to resign.

CAUTIOUS.—Your best plan would be to transfer your money to the post-office, and then you can deposit and draw anywhere.

SUFFERER.—Your best plan is to apply to your local dispensary doctor, who would be able to tell you of the nearest hospital.

COMMERCIAL.—We do not consider your writing at all below the commercial standard. It is very clear and free.

REGULAR READER.—The best way to feed goldfish is to scrape some raw meat or fish into their globe occasionally; they will also take crumbs of sweet biscuit.

MARTYR.—We have known absorbent cotton alone to cure soft corns. By applying fresh cotton every day, the corn will disappear—because the part is thus kept dry.

BUSINESS.—The fee for registration of a trade mark is £1; the mark must be properly transferred to you in the register. Address—Registrar, Patent Office, 25, Southampton Buildings, London, W.C.

DONIOUS.—If the man openly accuse you of theft, and declines to withdraw the charge or apologise, you have a good case against him for damages; his conduct is malicious in the extreme.

E. A. T.—A will may be proved as soon as the executors can declare to the value of the personality, and they may forthwith take proceedings for collecting all debts due to the estate.

SHETLAND PONY.—Shetland ponies are seldom more than four feet in height. They are so-called because raised in the islands of the same name, north of Scotland, where they are called shelties.

PETTE.—You can do nothing beyond taking regular exercise. Some say that bicycle-riding increases the length of the legs. It would be worth your while to try a safety.

IGNORANT.—Pieta is the name given to representatives of the Virgin Mary embracing the dead body of her son. It is a counterpart to the madonna with the infant Jesus in her arms.

F. L.—London is at least a half healthier than Glasgow; you can get the relative rates of mortality from the tables published weekly in the newspapers; London is not a manufacturing city, Glasgow is.

LEGAL.—If the alteration were made by the testator himself it would be valid, unless it could be shown that he was not capable of understanding what he was doing, in which case the will could be contested.

INDIGNANT.—A medical man is not legally compelled to attend a patient when suddenly called in. If death resulted through his refusal he might be held responsible if an inquest took place.

UNBELIEVER.—Sometimes it is effected by passes with the hands, sometimes by causing the patient to look fixedly at some object, a revolving disc being often used, sometimes by monotonous sounds, &c.

HARMONY.—The "Messiah" occupied the greater part of a month in composition, but was left with only organ accompaniments by its author; Mozart supplied the delightful instrumentation with which the grand oratorio is now accompanied.

TROUBLE.—In the absence of an agreement at the time of hiring a mistress may not deduct from a servant's wages the cost of articles accidentally broken. In case of wilful damage the mistress might recover.

D. D.—The following regiments took part in the charge of the Light Brigade: 4th Light Dragoons, 8th Hussars, 11th Hussars, 13th Light Dragoons, and 17th Lancers.

A CONSTANT READER.—Your statement of your ailment scarcely indicates its character, but we should imagine that you will benefit greatly by applying sulphur lotion to the irritated skin.

EMIGRANT.—You need not carry your money to Canada. You have only to go to a post office here, pay it in, and get an order on any post-office in the colony. A steerage passage costs £4 10s., and an intermediate £7 7s.

W. T.—To secure yourself, you should either take the part of the house as a lodger, or on a distinct tenancy from the owner. As a sub-tenant your goods would be liable to distraint for rent due by the direct tenant.

BOTHERED.—There are only two ways—either to put in a sub-tenant or to induce landlord to let you go and look for a sub-tenant himself on your paying him a substantial commission.

E. F. H.—It is the hangman who regulates the length of the drop to be given for the prisoner; he is supposed to be guided by his experience, but is at liberty to consult with the prison surgeon if he think fit.

H. G.—There is no apprenticeship to the work; you must gain admission to a trainer's stables, and get into his favour; when he sees that you have the makings of a jockey in you he will take care that you have proper training.

INQUIRER.—Give the particulars of the ship, date of sailing, name of captain, &c., as you have given to us, and address the secretary, Lloyd's Registry of British and Foreign Shipping, 2, White Lion-court, Cornhill, E.C. Enclose a stamped addressed envelope.

A PROPOSAL IN FOUR QUESTIONS.

"CAN you?" he asked with pleading voice,

"Can you, and make my heart rejoice?"

Coolly and calmly waves her fan;

Calmly and coolly it comes: "I can."

"Do you?" he asks in trembling tone.

"Do you, and love me alone?"

Looking at him with eyes so blue;

Slowly but truly it comes: "I do."

"Will you?" he asks with bated breath.

Silence reigns; it is still as death.

"Will you?" he queries, lower still,

Softly and sweetly it comes: "I will."

"May I?" with joyful voice 'tis said.

Quickly the pretty face grows red.

"May I?" again he needs must say.

Trembling and blushing she says, "You may."

A LOVER OF THE "LONDON READER."—A printer is obliged, under penalties, to affix his name to all bills, &c., issued in connection with a Parliamentary or similar election; but there is no such obligation with regard to ordinary printing.

INQUISITIVE.—As for our richest man, no one knows the amount of any man's wealth except he think fit to reveal it, and that is seldom done; what is published in the papers are merely guesses at the wealth of individuals.

BLUE FUNK.—If you are confident in your ability you need not fear to venture; keep yourself healthy meanwhile by wholesome food, daily bath, and regular outdoor exercise; your nervous funk has troubled the most eminent men.

WORRIED MOTHER.—You cannot remove the girl from school until she is fourteen years of age or has passed in the Fifth Standard; possibly the Board might permit you to send her to an evening school, and let you have her services during the day.

D. E. L.—The license for a four-wheeled carriage to be drawn by one horse is £1 is yearly. The license expires with the year. Half-rates are charged if the license is taken out between October 1 and December 31.

BUD.—You ought not to eat between meals, if possible. For luncheon, however, avoid arrowroot or any biscuits made from white flour; they are starchy. A growing youth requires salts and phosphates to make bone.

M. U.—An I O U is not a document to be sued upon; but if an action is brought to recover the money it can be produced as evidence of debt. Proceedings must be taken within six years from the last acknowledgment of the debt.

JUPITER.—Paste for feeding insectivorous singing-birds: Blanched sweet almonds, one pound; pea-meal, two pounds; butter, three ounces; saffron, a few grains; honey, q.s. Form the whole into a paste, and granulate it by pressing it through a colander; some add the yolks of two eggs.

C. P.—"Spanish fly," so called, is compounded of a little gold-green beetle, about three-quarters of an inch long, found in South-Western countries, rarely in England; first brought to this country from Spain; it frequents the ash, alder, privet, and other trees and shrubs, being always deterred by the powerful smell it creates.

DISTRACTED WIFE.—Your personal property cannot be taken for your husband's debts. But you must be in a position to prove that the property is yours. Should an attempt be made to seize your property you had better call in a solicitor at once.

COUNTRY LIFE.—Hens are best from three to five years old. In picking out hens, take those with bright eyes and small bright red combs. It is said that hens which have large combs, and which try to crow, are not good for much.

A. M.—The agreement cannot be cancelled except with your consent; you may agree to give up the house on being suitably compensated for the trouble and expense you will be put to in finding another, but you cannot be compelled to do so; arrangement between buyer and seller does not affect you.

UNDER AGE.—Certainly not; there is practically no difference between Scotch and English law as regards age at which parties may marry, except that in Scotland females of twelve and males of fourteen are not forbidden to marry, while in England if they marry without consent their marriage is legal and binding.

HELEY.—First, thoroughly shake them before a fire, then beat them with a cane and thoroughly comb through. This process should be repeated at least once a month, to be found entirely effectual. Camphor, rock sulphur and pepper all help to keep away the destroying moth.

NOT QUITE SURE.—It should be "a one," because "one" begins with a consonant sound. You must distinguish between a *one* and a *round* sound. The word "one" is pronounced as if the word were written "wun," and "w" has, in this case, a consonant sound. Thus, the vowel letter "o" has here the consonant sound of "w."

GAITY.—The magnifying power of optical glasses depends on the pureness of the material used, the process of manufacture, and the "rounding" of the surfaces. The subject may be studied under the heads of "glass," "optics," "microscope," &c., in any good encyclopedia. Or you may refer to some handbook on optics to be had through a bookseller.

HELPLESS.—The wife can refuse to accept the provision made for her in the will, and claim her *legitime*, which is one-third of her late husband's money and goods and one-third of the yearly rental of his houses and lands; you are in the best position for judging whether she will gain anything by setting up that claim and refusing what is given to her by the will.

NOEL.—(1.) From the slender information your letter affords—neither stating age or much else, we cannot give you much information. But why thinner? Surely in the ordinary way you don't think that adds to beauty? Be satisfied with nature, as we all have to be. (2.) If there is no malformation lisping comes from nervousness. Get over nervousness, which we should think at present has got some little hold upon you.

LORD DONCHESTER.—Peers and members of the Privy Council are entitled to be addressed as "right honourable." Eldest sons of peers, using their fathers' second titles, such as "Marquis of," or "Earl of," are described as "right honourable" by courtesy. In addressing an earl or viscount the proper style would be "the Right Hon. the Earl of &c., or 'the Right Hon. the Viscount' &c.-and-so.

A CARELESS GIRL.—A cleaning fluid which has been used upon silk and woollen fabrics with satisfactory results is made as follows: Put into a large saucepan two quarts of water, half an ounce of borax, and four ounces of white castile soap shaved fine, and stir frequently until the soap and borax are dissolved; then take from the fire and add two quarts of cold water. When the mixture is cold, add one ounce of glycerine. Bottle and put away for use; it will keep for years. To clean an article, first brush thoroughly, and then spread on a table. Sponge with the cleaning fluid and rub hard until the stains disappear.

A COUNTRY BUMPKIN.—London has not a hangman for herself, neither does Government appoint a hangman; when there are men to be hanged it is open to anyone to offer for the job to the local authorities, and the latter will engage the person who seems likely to do the work efficiently; there is usually one man who receives the bulk of the commissions; at one time Calcraft, Marwood, Hima, Berry, and now Billington; the Sheriff of London give this leading man a retaining fee, which entitles them to the first call upon his services in cases where an execution in the provinces is fixed for the same day as the one in London.

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††† We cannot undertake to return rejected manuscripts.

London: Published for the Proprietor, at 334, Strand, by G. F. CORNFORD; and printed by WOODFALL and KIMBER, 70 to 76, Long Acre, W.C.

